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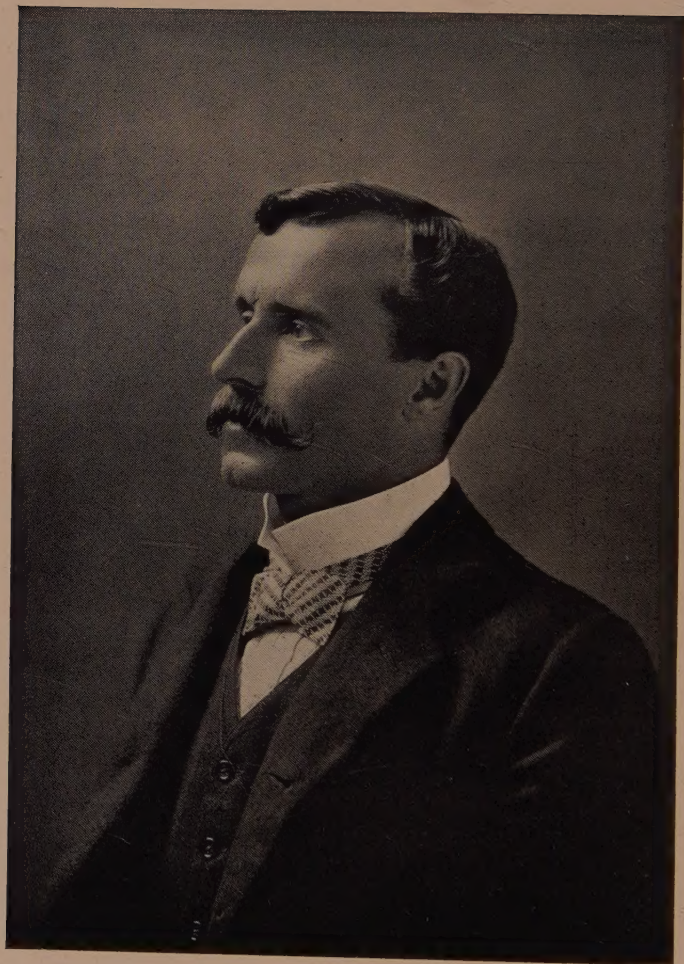
UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM
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IN THE WEB OF A WAR

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
(FRANCIS PREVOST)

RUST OF GOLD
ON THE VERGE
FALSE DAWN
ENTANGLEMENTS



Yours sincerely
H. J. Prevost Zattersby.

IN THE WEB OF A WAR

BY

H. F. PREVOST BATTERSBY



"EVER THE FAITH ENDURES,
ENGLAND, MY ENGLAND :—
'TAKE US AND BREAK US : WE ARE YOURS,
ENGLAND, MY OWN !'"

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

1900

TO
MY FATHER,
THE FIRST AND BEST SOLDIER
IN MY REMEMBRANCE, THESE SKETCHES
OF A BRIEF CAMPAIGN

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[The Author's thanks are due to the Editor of *The Morning Post* for permission to reprint those of his letters, collected here, which have appeared in that journal.]

IN THE WEB OF A WAR

CHAPTER I

THE HOUR OF SILENCE

"I will cause the noise of thy songs to cease."

SINCE these all too casual impressions of a campaign might, for the most part, preferably and so much more admirably have been done with a brush, names and dates and numbers are of little moment.

Still, the hour of their inception is of interest enough, since from it counted the fresh hopes of England—hopes which after three months of disappointment were at last to be fulfilled.

On January 10, 1900, Lord Roberts landed at the Cape and took command of our forces in South Africa. He had left London on Saturday, December 23rd, the last day of, perhaps, the gloomiest week in our history for close upon a hundred years. In it General Gatacre had at Stormberg lost a large proportion of his command,

Lord Methuen was fallen back from the shock of Magersfontein and the hopes of Kimberley to the banks of the Modder, and Sir Redvers Buller's first effort to relieve Ladysmith had been crushed at Colenso.

The mood in which England then was may be forgotten now, but it was memorable. Glum, silent, determined ; with damnation, it may be, in her eye for the men who had failed her, but not a word spoken of recrimination or of despair.

It was midwinter, too, a season dark and abominable ; and in London, for all that week, the shouted tidings of defeat and multiplied disaster had been muffled by a thick and freezing fog.

The faces that passed in the murky streets grew gloomy with foreboding of an unknown fate for friend and kin ; the posters were a blurred black with figures of the killed and wounded.

The whole island lay clothed in a dense and breathless mist, an enclosing darkness, pierced only by the tick of the telegraph, which made a darker centre in men's souls.

Yet that was the hour in which the island woke. Woke from its false dream of power, its comfortable complacency ; woke, man by man, each to a new sense of birthright, that right to die, despite all other claim, for the land which had given him being ; woke to a shame of pleasure and leisure and aimless days, while friend and brother were lying desperately beleaguered or still more desperately engaged by a foe we had underrated.

The hour of our humiliation was the hour of our

strength. It brought back to men's minds the sense of citizenship, the remembrance that no man can live unto himself alone, which years of success and long security had almost obscured. It made us desire something above the making of money and the luxury of increased possessions; it offered something that money cannot buy nor the law bequeath—the glory of valour and the fame of admirable deeds.

What does it matter if, as now we are assured, much in that ready offer of service would not bear analysis? There is that in action which does not need analysis. The question has been answered, the problem solved. The deed which needed doing has been done by those whom none could tell off to do it.

As a war this business in South Africa is not of much account; but it counts to England, as the empire's call to arms, far above more splendid victories. Men were drawn to South Africa from the ends of the earth, not for profit nor for fame, but simply by the blood that was in them and by the glamour of the name they bore. To enquire of their coming more particularly than that is, most emphatically, to be a fool. Their ready hand will prove enough for most of us; for all of us, certainly, who have seen them fall, smiling and unbeaten, to the bolt of death, or who have laid their bodies, the only part of them that would surrender, in the absorbing sand.

That is the evidence which action offers—a declaration, signed by a man's life, which needs no attesting; the silence of a stout heart concerning which assuredly we need no further witness.

CHAPTER II

AT THE CAPE

CAPETOWN, *January 23, 1900.*

THERE is nothing much more dull than the organisation of transport and supply, and to that just at present the military brain of Capetown is devoted. So many mules and so many wagons for the baggage of a brigade ; and so many more mules and so many more wagons to carry fodder for the first mules, and more mules, again, for the food of those which carry food for the first. Thus it works out, till at last the mule is reached which can carry food for himself. But the string is long before you come to that. Mules there are out here at present ; more than our existing organisation can handle ; but harness of all kinds is at a premium, and in Capetown leather of a certain character cannot be bought. Much that is being used has paid a very hurried visit to the tan-yard, and still reeks of the pelt.

Yet the work of equipment proceeds, though some of the stuff under requisition will give trouble to those who have hereafter to handle it. Despite the part which the railway is to play in our advance, every

division is to be provided with sufficient transport to render its progress completely independent of the line. It will thus be possible to detach any force for a turning movement should the Boers pursue their policy of sitting astride the railway. To attain this end oxen have to be employed for all the heavier baggage, owing to their superior pulling power at slow rates, and because on the veld, for the most part of the year, they can feed themselves.

The mule is an excellent beast of transport if he can go the pace that suits him best—about five miles an hour. At that rate there is no difficulty in getting thirty miles a day out of him. But at about two miles an hour, which is a fair pace for a baggage train, he is less useful. He cannot keep his shoulder against the collar when going so slowly, and chafes and worries himself all the way.

Ox transport, on the other hand, means immense columns on the line of march. Allowing forty yards for a wagon and span—a span being, as a rule, of sixteen oxen—200 wagons form a train five miles long, requiring, with relays, close on 4,000 oxen. All such extension adds, of course, to vulnerability on the line of march, but, without it, effective mobility cannot be attained, and until that has been arrived at no further advance in the Colony will be permitted.

But while up-country the guns fire, in the clear light of morn and evening, their daily salutes, and down-town, in sweltering offices, the staff toils and swears and mops its brow, we have here, at Mount Nelson, a curious placid backwater of action, with scarcely a hint of stress ; picturesque, suggestive, but

suggestive least of war. Behind us is the mountain, and in front, beyond the scented garden, are the roofs of Capetown, the sapphire loop of the bay, the white shores of sand, and the barren hills beyond them. We see the big troopers and the mails come in, the south-easter blows the dust in a red veil across the water, and we can sit beneath the fir-trees with the scent of the myrtle and oleander about us, while the city goes, unregarded, its hot and glaring way.

The convalescents among us give the terrace at times the look of a hospital, for there are men here from half the battles of the war, who still trail an injured leg behind them or carry a slung arm against their side. They are very cheerful patients, past the period when the fate of a limb is in the balance, and hopeful of getting another chance of being shot at in the near future. They tell with some persuasion the story of their fights, but their accounts are a humorous distance from the accepted versions, and will never acquire historic dignity.

Most of the khaki is supplied by the various staffs at present represented in Capetown, headquarter and divisional, with all the multifarious odds and ends fixed about a base or on their way northward to divers camps. Every one is to be met here at some time or other of the day, and men meet who can only reckon their meetings by campaigns.

The house faces to the sea like an opened horseshoe, and makes after dinner a most unwarlike spectacle, with the moon full on its whitened front, the misty height of the mountain behind it, and merry groups

of men and women strolling about the terrace or seated listening to the music about little tables in the brilliantly lit verandah. Not even at this distance from the front does uniform prevail at dinner, and colour is provided only by the women's dresses. Khaki at dinner has, indeed, a particular meaning, for the train to the north starts every evening shortly after nine. Consequently when a man appears at dinner somewhat earlier than usual, in dust-coloured garments and with his head shaven, one knows that his place will be empty next morning. He gets through his meal with some interruption of farewells, a few glasses may be lifted to him at dessert from other tables, and he goes out before the band has finished playing to start his long journey northward to the land of dust and hard living, and another fills his place.

The talk and the music and the laughter go on; for there are wives here with husbands at the front who have, of course, to conceal their anxieties, and husbands with wives 6,000 miles away: and with every steamer and the advent of fresh London faces the place becomes more like Homburg, Ostend, or Monte Carlo, and less like a base of landing at the seat of war.

Lord Roberts will before long be moving forward, and with him the interest of half the world; but Mount Nelson, one feels sure, will remain indifferent. It will learn languidly of fresh battles, will hear from the lips of other wounded its amusing stories of incapacity and discontent, will smooth its feathers and spread its frocks between the labour of

welcoming Tommy to South Africa with a cup of coffee, and of speeding his enteric exit with a penny bun.

And, above it, as beautiful and as indifferent, the clouds which the south-easter moulds out of the empty air will gather upon the top of Table Mountain, and drop seawards over its sheer front of stone.

Sometimes in snowy masses like the frozen Niagara, sometimes in veils of the filmiest lightness like wind-blown waterfalls that vanish in mid-air.

But falling always with that melting sense of exquisite movement, as the clear wind is changed by the cold stone into cloudy whiteness, and fades again to the invisible as it falls townward to warmer levels in floating threads of lawn.

* * * * *

The eight-year-old picaninny shook his fez further back on his shaven head, and sucked the bunch of oleander blossom in his mouth to a tighter pink cluster in the shining darkness of his face.

He was seated on the end of a pile of teak which had been shifted to the edge of the blazing wharf known as the South Arm. The sunlight from the blue water danced sparkling over him, but his head was turned the other way. He was watching a train-load of soldiers crawling from the wharf along the dusty streets with as much khaki outside as inside the carriage windows, occupied in keen inspection of the new country, and with chaff to spare for its inhabitants.

The picaninny receives a share of it, but he takes no notice. He has seen a good deal of this sort of

thing in the last few weeks, and may have his own theories about soldiers. He pouts out the oleanders till their pink petals bury his stubby black nose ; but he keeps his own counsel.

The train goes its way through the whirls of dust along the roadway, cutting the traffic into irritated lengths of wagons, cabs, Cape carts, and bicycles, as the rails curve from side to side of the street. Meanwhile, the whirr of the donkey engine never ceases down the scorching front of the South Arm. The great transports lie beside it, one astern of the other, till the last is lost in the tangle of masts in the bay.

On the wharf is everything that may be needed by an army: squat howitzers for the siege-train, and long six-inch quick-firers, looking more cunningly wicked in their coating of khaki ; huge pyramids of forage, built with scented bricks, four feet square, of hay ; mounds of provision cases high as the funnels, of cord-handled ammunition-boxes, of rolled tents, and bags of mule equipment. The southeaster sends the golden chaff of the oat-hay in twisting eddies down the wharf, making everywhere a slippery footing and blinding the toilers at the winches with dust.

Along the whole length of the quay a vast shed has been built, and is piled to the roof with stores. Beyond it a train is always being filled, and one is continually going forward with trucks loaded to the brim. The men who have blistered and toiled since September on that baking front are the real workers of war, and it is thanks to them that a hundred thousand men are being fed and fought six thousand

miles from home with never a dinner missing nor a cartridge short.

* * * *

Only obliquely can one obtain opinions here on points of interest. From members of the Government one expects only public views, and when they are kind enough to admit the personal standpoint one's criticism is only the more restricted. But from their immediate supporters one gathers the party view untuned by responsibility and unguarded by conditions. This, as voiced by men who make no concealment of their Dutch sympathies, is interesting, since it concerns itself with settlement.

The feeling against Great Britain's action is as bitter as ever. Mr. Chamberlain is denounced with untempered venom—it is rare indeed to find a man so widely and so fiercely hated—but the talk is all of terms, of approachment, of generous treatment. It is true that the terms suggested are such as Great Britain could not accept; the significant fact is their suggestion by men who spoke but a month ago of a Dutch Republic for the Cape, and who have had no apparent cause to moderate their aspirations. It is indeed our reverses, and not our victories, which are responsible for the change.

The attitude of Great Britain under defeat has opened disloyal eyes to the Power with which they have to do. We are a queer people; only when things go badly are we seen at our best. South Africa was misled by the weakness of our strength. It is being enlightened now by the strength of

our weakness. The Dutch public that reads *Ons Land* only still pins its faith to the Transvaal's success. Small blame to it. Journalistic mendacity could be carried no further than by that curious print. Even its veracity conveys a false impression. But our English-reading ill-wishers are beginning to doubt if a hundred dead rooineks to one wounded Boer is the correct proportion in every battle, and the appreciation which our attitude has wrung from the Continental Press has also influenced their opinion.

Dr. Leyds was believed to hold Europe in the hollow of his hand. It is realised now that there is not much in that capacious palm but the remains of the gold which it carried, and that the cleverest political conjurer of the last decade has done his country very little good.

Guesses are hazarded by men who have ground for guesswork as to the probable duration of the war. The most sanguine I have yet heard was ventured by a member of the Government, who has an earned reputation for clear seeing and common sense. His date is the end of March. A millionaire, who knew the country for many years before making his money, says September. Lord Kitchener, who has a great capacity for patience, shakes his head at a far less sanguine estimate. From the soldiers' standpoint Lord Kitchener's judgment cannot be questioned. Fought to a finish, the war might take the full of two years, but such endurance is most improbable. The problem may presently be complicated by the

generation of new elements, the effect of which cannot be foretold.

But for the present we go slow. The hand on the lever is not likely to be hurried. There is a note of mastery in its indifference to time, in its confident shaping of destiny. For we are being run now as a business concern, and for the moment, during stock-taking, the shutters are up.

CHAPTER III

ACROSS THE KARROO

ORANGE RIVER, *February 1st.*

CONCEIVE a series of settees, shaped roughly like a quarter moon, each with a seat higher than the other, each with a back higher than the other, set hard together seat to back, with the seat of the southernmost against the sea, and you have in a general fashion the profile of South Africa.

Starting from Capetown in the evening after dinner, one is drawn by night along the lowest seat in the series—the rich lands of the Coast Plateaux, green with wheatfields and vineyards, crosses the Lange Bergen which forms its back—and finds oneself by dawn on the seat of the second settee—the Little Karroo.

The greenness of the fields is gone. Only scrub and rocks remain. Scrub of dry stiff little bushes, a foot or so high, a foot or so apart, in shades of orange, gamboge, lichen green, and lavender, with rock and sand of rust-red and madder. The hills are of strange shapes, with tops flat as a table or sharp as a pyramid, and in every stage of transformation between the two. For these mountains are all of one make—friable

strata between belts of stone ; and when each stone band is broken by time and the weather, the softer stuff is ever being washed and wasted downwards to the next. It is a country with a colour charm of its own, but the mind needs time to grow used to its desolation.

The back of the Little Karroo is the Groote Zwarte Bergen, and once over that one is on the seat of the third settee—the Central or Great Karroo.

The railway does not climb over the tops of the seat backs—for they are decorated with carving in the way of mountains up to seven thousand feet—but finds a way through, so that it rises steadily from seat to seat.

The Great Karroo is sheer dreary barrenness.

From the hills of crumbling stone the heat springs as from an opened furnace ; and the wide rivers, which the map shows, are but white channels of sand that blind the eye.

The scorching wind fans across it in unblended waves, from some of which the face turns involuntarily away.

The scrub is sparse or burnt off entirely, the ground is strewn with shattered fragments of red ironstone, and even the mimosa is withered to blanched tangles of thorn.

Yet along the empty watercourses it shows still a green hedge, still carries its fluffy blossoms, for its roots stretch deep towards the hidden courses whither the water is gone.

For, strangely enough, underneath most of this parched land the water moves, and twenty, thirty,

forty feet below the burning surface goes its unknown way.

But of its waiting and of its moving only the mimosa gives a sign ; there is nothing else in that red waste of rock and sand that wears the fresher colours of life.

The Nieuwfeld Range, which runs under many names from sea to sea, forms the back of the third settee, and through it, rising from Beaufort West, one climbs to the Northern Karroo, which extends northward to the Orange River.

Karoo is but a barren veld, and the veld a fertile karroo, and one blends in the other without apparent change of level as from the west or south one approaches the Free State and the Transvaal.

De Aar is in the centre of the Northern Karroo, and here the civic influence on the railway ceases and one is handed over to the military power.

The man who has seen De Aar must say if it be worth describing. For as a rule it lies invisible under clouds of dust.

Not, of course, that it has a monopoly of that form of discomfort ; but while other places have dust storms, De Aar has a dust atmosphere.

Thence to Orange River one has some seventy miles to go, and the military train does the distance uncomfortably in seven hours.

The line is single, and at the various stations, consisting for the most part of a white board with a name in black, one has to wait a passing train, which may be anything from five minutes to an hour late. Hence there are no time-tables, and the guard's optimism

does not extend to the hour of arrival. There is a haziness over his anticipations of departure also, when one is at last ejected at Orange River.

But, once become a by-product of military operations, he is poor indeed who has not patience; and Orange River is for the moment an interesting place.

It is the advanced supply depôt for Modder River, and in process of becoming the camp of the Sixth Division.

There are walls of wooden cases thirty feet high, acres of brown transport wagons and grey pontoons, endless piles of furled tents, sacks of corn, mealies, and potatoes, yellow pyramids of hay.

Sidings have been run out on either flank of the station and platforms improvised, rails being laid on stacks of sleepers and loosely floored with the same material, and from the laden trucks beside them long trains of ox-wagons move continuously towards the rising cones of tents, and are lost to sight in the red veil of dust.

The greater part of the 14th Brigade under Sir Herbert Chermiside is here already, and General Tucker will soon be on the spot with the rest of his division, but whence that division will move is known only to the Directing Powers, if indeed it has been decided on by them.

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN THE RIVERS

ORANGE RIVER, *February 5th.*

THE sun feels like a heated iron held close to the skin ; one cannot grasp a piece of wood which has been lying in it. The deep hot red sand makes intolerable the soles of one's boots, and the dust rises at each footstep, and clings to everything that moves.

The camp lies on either side of the railway, south of the low hills that hide the river, and Orange River station is in the midst of it. About the station there is a city of stores, huge mounds of forage, ammunition, and provisions wrapped in tarpaulins, looking like the dwellings of some uncouth people ; and beyond, on all sides, the pointed tents.

To and fro amongst them, in a trail of dust that never settles, move continuously the long strange trains of transport. Trucks of horses ; open wagons filled with men, or piled with guns, or with men piled above the guns, like some emblematic car in a procession ; weird extenuated country carts, half tented, brimming with camp equipment, alternating with

naval ordnance hooded in oilskin, or a string of grey pontoons.

The sidings are choked by trains loaded with an army, and up and down among them go the groaning engines, picking up a portion here and there, and moving with an ever-lengthening tail, till one at last has its complement, and creeps slowly out up towards the river and is hidden among the hills.

Progress is maddeningly slow, for there is but a single line from De Aar to the Modder, and hour after hour in the stifling dust under the blistering sun sit the open car-loads in khaki, drawn up and down, to and fro, hitched to an ambulance train, hitched to an ammunition train, hitched to a horse train, and then thrust away somewhere beyond the points, apparently forgotten. They breakfast on board, eat their midday meal there, and the afternoon finds them where they stood at dawn.

But yet northward, hour after hour, the army goes, and outwards into the empty veld the white camp grows beside the Modder; for from the west the next blow is to be struck, and is to be struck soon.

At Orange River, for the moment, the new movement is most clearly to be seen; for there the tide of troops flowing north from Capetown is mingled with that which comes from the melting camps at Rensburg, Thebus, and Naauwpoort Junction; and hence they pour, on horse, on foot, and by rail through the slender red lattice bridge across the river to their unknown fortune in the north.

Meanwhile by that narrow bridge the tide is

dammed and spreads beside it in a flood of horses and tents and guns.

At evening from one of these low hills by the river it looks like one of the great fairs of Southern Russia, for in the twilight the veld has something of the darkness, silence, and mystery of the Steppe. Its purples are not so deep as those that twilight wears above the black earth of the Volga, but they have clearness and space. And the resemblance is strengthened when the floating silvery veil of dust, which seems to rise with the evening, gives to all within it a magic distance—the tents, the tethered horses, the ungainly carts, the orange brightness of the camp fires—while out on the darkening veld the labouring spans of oxen can only be seen to move by the growing tail of dust behind them.

No man could paint that picture and paint into it the sense of war. Even the bugles which cry to each other down there about the fires have no stern hardness in them—no song of death. The thinnest sickle of the new moon gleams pale above the hill in the redness which the sun has left, with the evening star set a moon's breadth above it, as in a jeweller's design. There is not in all those miles of air the dimness for one bead of dew. The moon rests unbent on its end before it moves beneath the hill, and, clear as its sinking flame, the little melancholy twitter of the Kaffir phinxes laments the hour. That and not the camp bugle gives the real "last post," the night call of this arid country into which we have come.

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The Orange River, now very low, runs over dark rocks between white blown hills of sand, which, covered with scrub and trees, conceal it from one's approach.

The hills grow fewer and smaller as one advances northward, and the country beyond the river becomes more and more open, till it spreads into a wide plain, with low kopjes and lengths of flat-topped hill rising abruptly from it.

The pace of the train is even more tedious than before, and in place of the guardian tent or two at each station there is a little camp. The camps increase in size as one proceeds—Witteputs, Belmont, Graspan, Enslin—and then decline towards the Modder, and, with their trenches and sandbag revetments about the stations, strike at last the note of war.

The fifty miles between the Orange and Modder Rivers are covered in close on seven hours, so that night has fallen before we are half way. The camps show merely as lines of lighted tents ; but at Enslin there is a bonfire, where the Australians are cheering the orders, just arrived, which are to take them to Naauwpoort on the morrow. The Colonials have still the volunteer ardour in their way of war. Tommy would be quite as cheerful at the prospect of exchanging a camp on lines of communication for a new field of action. But he would hide his cheerfulness under a growl, and turn in to get all the sleep he could before starting. But the Australians are dancing round their fire.

There is but one dramatic moment on this dreary

journey, when one looks out about midnight for some sign of a destination and sees a sudden pulsing glow like the whitest of summer lightning leap from beneath the horizon into the sky ahead. A long swift cone of answering light that cleaves the night to our left explains the appearance.

It is Kimberley calling across the dark veld, calling over the hills that stand between us, over the guards that lie about her, over the lines of trenches that bar our way, and over the silent camp which came to help her.

Kimberley that so many, many weeks ago saw for the first time our searchlight flash from beyond the Modder, and counted with exultation in so few days to be free !

Kimberley, eating her horses, and perhaps her rats ; waiting, waiting day by day, with an ever more pressing anxiety, looking in vain for the columns which have failed by so few miles to reach her.

So, every night she speaks to us, and the camp, inured by custom, does not turn its head ; but to a newcomer the humiliation of helplessness is bitter and fresh and keen.

One would give a good deal to know what that beleaguered light is saying ; but it speaks in cypher, and its flashes, uninterpreted, make no sense.

One has been told how the hearts of Kimberley sank when, on the night after our fight by the Modder, the searchlight disappeared. One wonders now how they regard it, while week after week it says, " Wait ! "

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It is easy to understand how, aided by a little optimism, the battle of the Modder came about. The country south of the river is flat as the Steppe, falling ever so slightly towards the north. There is no cover of any sort for several miles, not a bush that rises above the knee.

The course of the river, which lies some thirty feet beneath its banks, can only be traced by the fringe of tree-tops which rise above them.

The ground slopes very gently upward on the further side, and beyond the roll of the slope are the purple ridges of Magersfontein.

There was nothing to suggest a position lying hid in that bare burnt plain, while the dark hills beyond spoke unmistakably of resistance.

The difficulties of effective reconnaissance were immense. Under the southern bank of the river the enemy could move in absolute concealment, whereas our advancing scouts could be seen six miles away. Thus a similar appearance and similar difficulties could be presented whether the banks were occupied by 300 or by 3,000 men. It is, indeed, a fact that the number concealed there was correctly estimated, but the estimate was not accepted, and only a show of resistance was foreseen.

The result is history, and a fresh proof that in war it is always wisdom to expect the worst.

With some subtlety of advance Modder River might have been made a name of hateful memories to the Boers. They were giving battle on the enemy's side of a river which could be crossed both above and below their position, with only a drift behind them by which to retreat.

Commandant Cronje had selected the position, and showed thereby a keen appreciation of his opponent's deficiencies.

It is possible that he would have withdrawn from it had we attempted to out-manceuvre him. But our method was too straightforward, and we ran into very much the same shape of trap that one sets for eels.

Once more all honour to the guns which saved us, as they saved us at Magersfontein, which were fought on an open plain where no infantry could stand erect within 900 yards of the enemy's trenches. In the 75th Field Battery, which was the most exposed, Captain Farrell, who had been shot through the left leg four days before at Belmont, was shot through the right at the Modder, but, declining to be invalided, was with his guns at Magersfontein, and Major Lindsay, wounded in the hand, also refused to be laid by.

That is how the Royal Artillery understands "Ubique."

CHAPTER V

MUD RIVER CAMP

MODDER RIVER, *February 9th.*

WHEN the first shot was fired across the Modder the land was green in its way. It had at least on it a make-believe of grass, a sparse dried untoothsome-looking herbage, which man and beast accepted as fodder. Now it is a blazing red waste of sand. The waste extends, the sand is intensified, as regiment is added to regiment, battalion to battalion, battery to battery, troop to troop. The dust which was once a nuisance is now little less than a plague. It is always being stirred—by the strings of horses on their way to watering, which pass and repass to the river almost every hour of the day, by the kicking squealing droves of transport mules, by the long spans of oxen. It rises on the stillest days, without warning, in thin twisting spirals of yellow sand, which take their own way, beautiful and abominable, across the camp, befouling everything, upsetting everything that stands across their course, and reaching for hundreds of feet upward into the still blue sky.

But the dust-devils are little more than an amuse-

ment to our dust-ridden souls. It is the dust which comes, not in dainty spirals, but in overwhelming clouds, that we fear; which hides, not a tent here and there, but the entire camp, the roof of heaven, all vestige of the world; which blinds the eyes and brings blood to the eyelids, fills the mouth with its gritty foulness, and coats every inch of the body with a film of brown; which lasts not for a few blustering moments, but hour after hour of unrelieved discomfort, during which it is impossible to ride, to write, to eat, or to forgive one's enemies. Well, we shall have, please Heaven, but few days more of it now.

After the dust—and but a short way after—the flies! One used to think, as a child, beside the lice and the blood and the blains, that the Egyptians were let off rather lightly with flies. A short stay by the Modder alters that opinion. The tent is stippled with them; the jam pots hum under the hand that lifts them from the table, and the flies stream out between one's fingers like black spouts of smoke. A sudden pyramid of them forms on every morsel of food, and one's hand is never at rest sweeping them from one's face. They follow the ink as one writes in search of some fresh experience, and the pen is often clogged with their severed feet. Beyond doubt one did the Egyptians an injustice.

But with the dust and the flies our troubles cease. There are scorpions, no doubt, tarantulas, lice, and other little things of the kind, but these are but incidental worries. Against them must be set the magnificent sunlight day after day, the clear cool nights, the plenitude of the air.

The very evenness of the weather might tend to boredom, and one would not take thirty days of it in exchange for any changeful chanceful summer month at home. But for the camper-out it is admirable. One has a morning swim in the Modder if one has overcome one's fears of the legendary blue monkeys that rise out of its depths to drag men down, and a more reasonable dislike for its muddy waters, which grow thicker and sink lower with every day, and one makes one's toilet on the open veld with the sun, even at five o'clock, warm enough for a towel. One's meals are all spread under the sky—there is, to speak truth, very little spreading—and one sleeps, wrapt in a blanket, beneath the moon. To lead such a life, uninterrupted of the weather, is to be served by Nature very well indeed.

There has been threatening rain of late, but nothing came of it but a few flogging drops that beat through a dust storm, and a flickering circle of lightning after sunset about the rim of the sky. The clouds hung for two nights on either side the Kimberley searchlight, and mimicked it flashes in an impish fashion, as if in mockery of the message it was trying to send. But Kimberley has perhaps learnt that at last we move to its assistance, for the long space of inactivity here is to be ended on the 10th, and not long after we hope to have crossed the border and be fighting the enemy on his own ground.

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Lord Roberts and his Chief of Staff arrived yesterday, and dates are again being fixed for dinners in Pretorià, with the hope that springs eternally at the

chance of action, though it needed some little fertilising here. Headquarters is at present on the train in which the Commander-in-Chief arrived, which stands on a siding to the south of the Modder, on the extreme verge of the Sixth Division, a suburb difficult of access, and previously but little visited, as it is a couple of miles, with an awkward pontoon bridge, or a still more awkward drift, from Lord Methuen's quarters in front of the station.

Now everything of importance in camp is to be seen making its way to the distant siding in the sand and the scrub. It is just possible that Lord Roberts is remaining on the railway since he may use it again to move south, if the main advance is to be, as seems probable, from Enslin.

The army looks ten years older than when it left England. We are not yet in rags, but we are exceedingly dirty; and between the close-cropped crowns and bearded chins it is difficult to recognise one's nearest friends. A man may soon have his fill of war, and most of those who have been here from the beginning are heartily tired of the dreary country and would change it cheerfully for the worst they know elsewhere.

But their experiences have not been of the best, and the nerves of the two brigades that bore the brunt of Lord Methuen's methods were for some little while not quite what they had been. There are more 'God willings' appended daily to future plans in this camp by the Modder than probably, under happier circumstances, the whole British army makes use of in a year: and though that has no unhealthy

significance, it marks a change, and tells of a more grave adventure than do the serious brown faces. Small wonder, seeing these little knots of men which were once regimental messes, and even among these the faces of outsiders, drafted in to keep the regiment going, small wonder that the few who remain should cease to reckon the future theirs, and be more than commonly conscious of a controlling Providence.

CHAPTER VI

INVASION

JACOBSDAL, *February 17th.*

A HARMONIUM stands in the stoep, with a japanned tin mug on the keyboard and some bottles on the top. Broken furniture and the sweepings of dirty floors are piled against a corner of the garden wall. A red flag flaps before the house, and like bees about it, the staff of a division, mostly in its shirt-sleeves, buzzes in and out of the doorways.

The owners of the house are fled; for this, at last, is invasion, and we are in the enemy's country, after four months' fighting in our own.

The move began on Saturday, the 10th of February, a force of Mounted Infantry crossing the bridge at Orange River and striking eastward into the Free State. General French with the Cavalry Division and General Tucker with the Seventh Division crossed the border from Honeynest Kloof and Enslin the next day, and the Sixth Division, under General Kelly-Kenny, followed from Gras Pan on the 12th.

The move was well conceived, well concealed, and smartly carried out. The camps on the Modder and Orange Rivers supplied most of the material, and the points of entrance are, roughly speaking, half-way between them.

Ramdam was the first halting-place, the Riet River the second, and through these the three divisions passed, each a day ahead of the other; the cavalry, which led the way, having to clear the enemy from some rising ground on the way to the river and from the drift when they reached it; but, save poor Majendie, shot through the body above the drift, suffered very little from the enemy's opposition.

The cavalry pushed on as soon as the Seventh Division were established on the Riet, and reached the Modder the next evening, capturing a laager. With the upper drift of the Modder in our hands the position at Magersfontein has virtually been turned, and the Boers, if they elect to remain there, will be cut off from their base, if, indeed, their methods of warfare admit of such considerations.

An army on the march is sufficiently impressive in this part of South Africa. The absence of made roads, the speedy conversion of the veld tracks into a morass of sand, make the transport of a division a thing of miles.

At Ramdam the transport train of the Seventh Division filled the great empty flat-bottomed pan, which in a wet season would have been covered with many acres of water. It began to move out towards the Riet at 3 p.m. It continued to move out until 3.30 the next morning.

Crossing the dark veld at sunset that slow procession had a weird beauty of its own.

The evening was absolutely still and clear, and the gray soft smoke of dust, which burst in puffs from every footfall, clung about the miles of wagons like a cocoon.

Looking westward, where the train rose over the roll of ground about the pan, the dust that drifted across the sunset became a wondrous smoke of gold, filled with strange creatures and monstrous shapes. The gold faded to rose, and from rose to silver, as the track sank into the dark shadow of the down, and the beasts and carts which filled it took again their own shapes and size.

Eastward the coil stretched gray and dismal into the cold purples of the veld. A breath of air fanned it slantwise, and hid all but the heads of the mules and the horns of the oxen, the canvas hoods of the wagons, the long shafts of the whips.

These remained cut off like mountain-tops above cloud, but ever nodding, swaying, jolting onwards, as if afloat on the gray flood.

The dust was so foul, so contaminating, that after an hour's effort to ride through it we pulled the cart out of the ruck and outspanned on the veld.

All night beside us moved that misty cable under the full moon, 'the smoke of its torment' growing thicker, till nothing that it curtained could be seen. But within the murk of it never ceased the yells of the Kaffirs, like the wild cries of beasts, the wheep of the long whips, the squealing of the mules, the groaning wheels.

It was gone by dawn, its track marked here and there by an abandoned wagon, by fallen oxen, by a dead or dying horse.

But at the Riet the worst task was before it, for the banks, some 300 yards apart, are of the lightest and most yielding sand, and the river lies some sixty steep feet beneath them.

Many of the troops were on the further side, and food had to be taken at once across to them, but the taking was a hateful sight, and it lasted for close on twenty hours. If a purgatory be appointed for the beasts, they will not have to seek it in another world.

With five columns on the move at one time it was impossible to see the work of each, but staying with one ensured missing that done by the other four.

Moving independently entailed some risks in an enemy's country where the enemy was showing a disposition to appear where not expected, and meant almost continuous travelling, but it gave one an insight into the handling of an army which could not otherwise have been obtained.

Riding from Modder River to Enslin one could see the start of French's Cavalry Division, and find at the latter place the nucleus of the advance.

Going on without a break to Ramdam, one lunched in the camp of the Sixth Division fourteen miles further east, and after a few hours' rest in the hottest of the day, travelled through the night with the baggage train of the Seventh, joining its headquarters and that of the cavalry next morning on the Riet.

A night march across a wild vortex of thunderstorms brought one, drenched, with the Seventh Division at 2 a.m. to a second drift of the Riet, and after two hours' sleep it was possible to push on to the Modder for the first fight there in the final dash to Kimberley, and to take part in the second with the Sixth Division the following morning.

After that scorching fifteen hours, headquarters at Jacobsdal had to be reached on the 17th for permission to telegraph from Modder River Station, and a return made at once to pick up the fighting on the road to Bloemfontein.

Meanwhile one lives on a pocketful of ship's biscuit, and sleeps on the veld with a horse beside one and a saddle under one's head : and one does not grow fat.

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The fight of February 16th is the only one in the advance so far of any magnitude.

It developed unexpected proportions, as the extent of the Boer retreat was not known when it was planned.

Shortly after 5 a.m. Colonel Hannay's Mounted Infantry, supported by the 13th Infantry Brigade, moved out of camp—that of Klip Drift on the Modder—the intention being to push the Mounted Infantry through to support French, who had arrived in Kimberley on the previous evening.

However, when about six miles out, the enemy was discovered to have altered his position of the day before, and to be posted with a 12-pounder on the end of a line of kopjes which ran for some four miles

almost parallel to a great bend of the river from north-west to south-east, where it terminated in a strong camel-humped hill called Klip Kraal.

The Mounted Infantry cleared this first position, and the enemy began to retire across our front, which was now composed of the West Riding, Gloucesters, Buffs, and Oxfords, under Brigadier-General Knox, on the south side of the river, while the Mounted Infantry continued to advance on the further bank, curling up the enemy's right flank.

General Knox's Brigade pushed across the drift in the face of a continuous but inaccurate fire, the Oxfords, who were most exposed to it, only losing two men wounded.

Once we were across the river the enemy fell back : about 1,800 of his force cantering easily southward just out of reach of our rifle fire. Our force then changed front to the right, and, preceded by a squadron of Mounted Infantry, went in pursuit with the Modder on the right, the Gloucesters being nearest the river and the West Riding, Oxfords, and Buffs extending from it in the order named. A single scout, sent ahead along the left bank, would have at once discovered the enemy in possession of Klip Kraal, and have revealed the impossibility of success from a frontal attack ; but our methods of reconnaissance are still terribly defective, and, after the mounted men had drawn a volley from the hill, the infantry went straight, and, as it proved, quite uselessly, for it.

The Gloucesters, who had to advance with no

protection, were allowed by the enemy to come within 500 yards, and then were sent on to their faces by a sudden rattle of musketry which seemed to come from the entire hill. A few rushes forward were pluckily made, but only added to the blunder, for the men in the end were unable to move backward or forward, but lay the whole day in the blazing heat spread flat to the earth, the bullets sending little flips of sand into their faces for close on eight hours. That with one bottle of water and a certain fondness for life is an experience no man would desire. The guns at last got across the drift and opened fire on the kopje, and the smoke of their shrapnel must have been a welcome sight to the men who were straining their eyes to see anything to aim at, while they lay on, hour after hour, with death never more than a few feet away. The shelling was beautifully done, the front of the kopje being searched from the base to the top, but, as it seemed, without avail, the slightest movement of our men beneath it bringing an undiminished splutter of lead.

Meanwhile the fight was seen to be of such magnitude that the original disposition of the Mounted Infantry was abandoned, and they were transferred from the left to the right flank, thus forming a certain link between the 13th Brigade and camp—an advisable precaution, seeing that it had advanced entirely without support, that a river lay across its line of retreat, and that the enemy could have intercepted that retreat by crossing the river higher up—and also with the object of turning the flank of the Boer force upon Klip Kraal.

So far, however, the real significance of the occasion had not been guessed. The enemy seemed certainly to be fighting a rearguard action, but what it was to guard, where the main body might be going, and of what it might consist, no one knew.

The Mounted Infantry failed to work their way behind the Kraal, and their failure proved the Boers to be holding the river considerably further to the eastward than had been supposed. The position they had taken up would probably have commended itself to no other people. The river twisted as often and as curiously as the snake of commerce, and it was impossible to tell during the entire day from which bend or from which bank bullets would not come. While watching the infantry advance on Klip Kraal, from a loop of the river which gave also a view of the defenders, my hat was punctured by a Mauser, and, almost immediately after, the horse standing beside me was hit by a Lee-Metford from some men on our own right flank in the river-bed, who were so anxious to bag something that Peter carried away my belt to which he was tethered, and cleared for a quieter spot. And later in the day on the further flank, though I was riding straight back to the river from our proper front, the men holding the drift there were so ignorant of their own whereabouts that they had twice the disappointment of making me a prisoner.

It was the effort to surround Klip Kraal which disclosed at last the force by which we were opposed.

Though the mirage caused by the sun-glare makes

a field-glass almost useless for many hours of the day, Lord Kitchener, who was watching the operations on the right flank in the early afternoon, decided that a trail of dust to which his attention had been called must come from a very considerable convoy. Instantly he divined the situation. Cronje was upon the move. He had abandoned Kimberley and his position at Magersfontein, and was in full flight for the capital. Almost by pure accident we had struck across his tracks. But the man who had struck them knew how to use an accident. A field battery was hurriedly ordered up to open upon the laager. Not an hour's rest must be given to those tired beasts. But the enemy had foreseen our discovery. The battery came at once under a fire from both flanks out of the river-bed. A fresh position had to be selected, but at last a white shell-burst opened like a tuft of bog-cotton over the out-spanned cattle, and we knew that their rest was ended, and that the dark camp of wagons would in half an hour be strung out along the road.

But the enemy still held on so tenaciously to his left that our centre could make no progress, and so cunningly did he use the twisting river bank that the loss was almost entirely on our side, and we were compelled, as a wild dust storm came with the dusk, to fall back, and leave the force on the kopje to make good its escape with night if it so desired. Our battery, meanwhile, continued to drop its shells into the enemy's laager till the last span of oxen had moved out of range.

At dawn to-day the Sixth Division started in pursuit, and, in combination with the Cavalry Division advancing from Kimberley, should be able to capture the convoy or force on a general action in its defence.

CHAPTER VII

THE POINT OF VIEW

PAARDEBERG, *February 18th.*

TWENTY yards to the left a man is lying pressed flat against the ground. He is very much the ground colour, and the occasional whirls of red dust which have blown over him have aided the disguise. There are little tufts of withered scrub which help to hide him, though but a few inches high. The sun has been blazing on his back and upon the sand about him for seven hours, and the veld wavers confusedly in the glare of heat. A pale blue lake of mirage has formed about the furthest kopjes, and left them floating like dark islands in the sky,

The man feels gingerly for the tin bottle which lies under his left elbow ; his fingers spread over its felt covering and give it a gentle shake. The shake is repeated, and he begins to draw the bottle slowly under him, keeping his body rigidly stiff. The job is a long one, because the bottle strap catches in his accoutrements, and he dare not move to free it. When he has it, at last, beneath him he begins to turn over, as slowly as he has done all else. He lifts

his foot a few inches to balance himself, and the next instant there is a spit of dust from the sand beside him, not much more than an arm's length away. He keeps his eyes on the mark the bullet has made, and remains for some moments as if he had been turned to stone. Then, with a more laborious patience, he resumes the movement, till at last he is on his back, and has the bottle above him.

It holds only a few hot drops ; but he thought he had drained even those an hour ago, and his tongue is like a piece of fur in his mouth. He got with a rush to the place he occupies at about eight o'clock in the morning, when a sudden crackle from the river in front of him laid the whole line on its face, where it has remained extended, with occasional wriggles forward. He is on the right of his company, and alone, for the man next him, after chaffing the Boer shooting for half an hour, began suddenly to whimper, and has since been still.

He failed himself to take the bullets humorously, but he grew used to them, till one came between his face and the ground and struck his belt buckle. Then he cursed them and was afraid, till he lost all other feelings in the awful sense of thirst.

He knows the action is going on, for he can hear the steady pounding of a battery from the hill behind him, and sudden scurries of rifle fire beyond the river on his left. He knows, too, from those hateful spits of dust, that the Boer is still behind the bushes in front of him ; but the Boer is always behind something, and he is tired of trying to shoot and of being shot at by a man whom he never sees. Besides, if he

lift his rifle, the dust begins to jump again : and the rifle barrel is blistering hot, the varnish is sizzling on the stock, as though it stood before a fire, and to touch it seems to quicken his unbearable thirst.

He tries to guess at the hour as the sun goes over and falls on his left side. He writes words in the sand with his finger and rubs them out, bewilders an ant which runs with its bundle of food in front of him ; does anything he can to keep from thinking of the maddening drought within him. What he really thinks of, God knows. "I lay there blarsting them Boers so long as I can remember," said one who had lost consciousness after eight hours of that kind of fighting, and his attitude was probably characteristic. But cursing is not cool work, and dries a man already droughty, while still the crackle of fire comes from the river, and death stands before a drink.

At last, while there are still some three hours of daylight, the patter of rifles along the dongas on the further bank grows more and more hurried till it runs into a continuous roll. A last determined disastrous attempt is being made to push back the enemy's right. The Seaforths, Cornwalls, and Canadians, mixed together, are clambering, leaping, blundering forward across the deep, intricate channels of the donga beds.

But the man on the other side of the river only knows of what is going forward by the swell and spread of the fire. Five minutes, and it has sunk again to the snap, snap, of solitary rifles. What has happened, whose are the bodies in those pits of death, where is the enemy and where the friend, he has not

the least idea. If things have gone well there will be fresh orders probably; but no orders come.

At six o'clock he has been twelve hours under fire; his last meal was a biscuit, fifteen hours back, when he had fallen in at three in the morning, after marching all the day before. But he is aware neither of weariness nor of hunger in the fever of his thirst. The flesh of his face, stained walnut brown by the sun, has a dry twisted look like the parched stems of the scrub, as though all the moisture had been wrung out of it. One grows to know that look out here. His fingers never leave his water-bottle, nor his eyes the green fringe of bush along the river. Another hour, and the guns above him cease firing, and a new fight seems to be beginning far away on the right. The sun is going down, and he can see nothing to the left of him but a hot golden gauze of dust.

Then out of it a man leaps, and makes a dash forward towards the river. There is a sharp ring of an order to stop him, and almost with it the quick stammer of half a dozen shots, and the man swings round and pitches forward on his back. The battle grows louder on the right, a howitzer battery has come into action, brownish puffs of lyddite are bursting along the wooded kopje. But the man lying in the scrub pays no heed to it.

His arms are spread out flat, his fingers dug into the sand. He is pulling himself slowly forwards, his eyes glaring ahead through the brush. When a bullet strikes near him he stops a moment, but

goes on again. So in half an hour he covers about fifty yards. He can see the cool hollow of the river ; but there is only brown grass along its banks, and his one chance lies in a dash. He is on all fours for a spring, but he gets no further. A rifle has been following the faint trail of dust above him, and he sinks down in a lump with a bullet through the head.

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In the cool March days at home it may seem incredible that a man should wittingly risk his life for a drink of water, but at Paardeberg no small number of men were killed, with the risk of the thing full in their faces, while trying, towards evening, to fill their bottles. One is inclined to think that no one knows what thirst is till he has endured it out here. The British soldier has thirsted in the thirstiest corners of the globe, but he admits the veld to be a fresh experience. Aden, India, Egypt, the Soudan ! but here is something, not hotter, not drier, not dustier, but less endurable for some reason. It is the army and South Africa together, no doubt, which is the cause—for men who have lived in Kimberley, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, and Natal, are only now, while campaigning, acquiring the experience—the army with its incessant trampling and the ceaseless fog of dust that hangs about its camps. And to that must be added the compulsory life in the sun, the sun at its hottest and driest hours, the entire absence of shade, the parching suction of the sand, which is bed, chair, and table.

It will be quite curious to live without a water-bottle slung about one's shoulder. One can scarcely remember the day when water was not regarded with reverence and jealous envy; when it could be made to run clear, continuous, and unvalued by a turn of the finger. Here, where one knows by the strap across one's shoulder the weight of what one drinks, the thought of water flowing through pipes seems a dream of paradise. And such water! Water through which one could see, which left no mud at the bottom of the mug, and did not stain what it was spilt on. One remembers that in England they analyse that kind of wonder. Why, the water we drink here is often too thick to filter. One cannot pump it through a Berkefeld candle!

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At Ramdam there was a big pond—what was left of moisture in the dam. One bathed in it only under the most pressing compulsion of cleanliness. The water was very shallow, but the mud was black and deep. One sank to the knees if one tried to walk, and so sat gently half in the mud and half in brown syrup, and thanked God for water. One rose from it with the green leeches hanging about one's body like bits of seaweed, and with a sprinkling of other less formidable insects.

Horses looked askance at that pool, but the men drank of it greedily, and drank of it, where alone they could reach it, when the horses' hoofs had churned it into a blackish-green liquor thick as soup.

Let every one who turns to-day a water-tap give a thought to those who are dipping buckets in South Africa, and be grateful for an exceeding privilege.

CHAPTER VIII

CONSUMMATION

PAARDEBERG, *February 21st.*

AFTER the pathetic futilities and tentative half-measures of this war, it is a mental relief to be confronted by a strategy boldly conceived and executed unflinchingly.

In this atmosphere of South Africa everything trembles, from the landscape in the glare of midday to men's plans of victory.

Mirage is everywhere ; the colours of uncertainty and pretence ; the fictitious mimicry of one's desires.

Lord Roberts's achievement stands relieved, not only by its own merits, but from the background of failure which had preceded it. It was the conception of a man undaunted by the successes of his foes, and accustomed not only to win his battles, but to take the risk of losing them.

It may be said that he had a larger opportunity than had already fallen here to a general in command. He had, and he used it. His strategy compelled him to run risks—to chance defeat in detail, to draw every available man from his lines of communi-

cation, to expose his transport—and he ran them. He counted on the moral effect which the daring of his plans might produce, and he counted rightly.

Cronje, lying in insolent security across the hopes of Kimberley, heard that an army had broken at five points into the State, and was moving no one knew whither.

Accustomed to the dragging impotence of our advances when unaided by a railway, he sent his outposts to stop us at the Modder and the Riet.

But the men to whom the task had been entrusted either found our scouts before them, or awaited them in too leisurely a mood. General French swept the drifts with his cavalry and his guns, and the men who held them fled precipitantly, leaving the damper in their billies beside the fire, and the eggs just broken for the spoon. And as French cleared the fords other portions of this army loomed up to hold them. The Seventh Division filled the upper drift of the Riet, the Sixth laid its grip on the lower.

Then, during successive nights, the unseen arm was extended between the rivers, and the Modder was seized. The great moment came when, with a hand on either stream, a threatening hand to every movement of its opponent, the Cavalry Division was flung forward in a wide sweep to the north-eastward, and Kimberley was relieved. Relieved almost without a shot fired or a man lost; relieved, and at the same moment made a menace to the force which had awaited confidently its fall for months.

That is strategy.

Cronje, who needs no instruction in such a matter,

knew it for what it was, saw by the swiftness and daring of the hand which had encompassed him that he was playing at last with a master in the game of war; and, with a resolution as swift as it was sound, flung over the hopes on which he had so long been building, threw his dreams to the winds, and fled.

It is not every commander that knows the hour of abandonment as well as the moment for assault, and is as willing to break his plans as to make them, but Cronje is one of them. Only his experience of our methods made him a day late. He still counted on our indecision, and his security betrayed him.

Despite a wonderful march from Magersfontein, his rearguard was struck at Klip Drift on the Modder, and a beautifully handled rearguard action could not shake off the troops which had come up on him, tired enough, hungry enough, but as eager for battle as he was to evade it.

They hung to his flanks for two nights and a day, and on the next Cronje found a foe in front of him as well; for, with scarcely a day's rest for hard-worked horses, French had swung out of Kimberley, and stood between him and home.

Behind, his enemy was growing stronger with every moment which delayed him; in front was the very force he could have no hope to elude—a force of mounted men and mounted guns, equal to his own in mobility, superior in effectiveness.

In a like position almost any European mounted force would have abandoned its transport, made a dash for the open, and failing, would have surrendered.

But dashing tactics suit the Boer as little as yielding is suited to Cronje.

His answer to our menace was the rat's. He and his force sank suddenly into the river-bed, sank as completely out of sight as though they had risen into the sky, and there at this moment they remain like a rat in a hole—snarling, spitting, but immovable.

An attempt was made on Sunday to drag the rat into daylight, an attempt which lasted for twelve hours, and which left the marks of the rat's teeth on every regiment which tried to draw him. Since then he has been very severely left alone.

Left alone would probably not express our attitude from the Boer point of view, for he has been subjected to every sort of agony which the artillerist has invented.

For two days, from either side of the river, shrapnel has swept the sunken reaches in which he is thought to lie, and lyddite has split its thunder over him and poured its foul green fumes into his trenches. The laager of cattle and wagons that stood on the bank above him has been left a smoking and ruined heap. Shells search his lair by night, he is cut off from sleep as from food, the river-bed is full of troops before and behind him, and his enemies have set a circle about its banks. Yet yield he will not.

There must be a horrible and determined hate to keep the hearts of undisciplined men in such resolute accord.

Early in the second day's bombardment a powder magazine was struck, and exploded in a white and

lovely cloud-burst which for a moment hid everything about it.

The cloud was floating into the sky before the sound of the explosion reached us, and the silence about its outburst had a very curious effect. But the loss of his ammunition made as little difference to the Boer as the expenditure of ours ; he did not return a shot nor give the least sign of his existence.

The river-bed, in which his thousands were supposed to be lying, might not have held a man ; indeed, shooting at so heedless and so still a place seemed almost ridiculous.

As these words are written the outcome remains to be revealed, but men who can sit unmoved for three days under so hideous a cannonade have a claim to a respectful salute from any nation on the earth.

Lord Roberts, with that humanity which has always distinguished him, declined to send his men against a position which artillery might make untenable, preferring to waste time rather than life, though time was precious.

The Boers still count on relief. But relief may prove to them more costly than surrender.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HANDS OF THE HEALERS

PAARDEBERG, *February 22nd.*

THERE is very often a strange effect of comedy about wounded men. The dead are not touched by it. However they are fallen—and they fall strangely enough—something in the tragic silence which seems to stand beside them, so palpable it is, warns off the eyes of mirth.

Not that there is about them what in death is called majestic. There is no majesty in bodies rent by bullets or burst by powder : they may be gruesome, tragical, pathetic, but they have lost even what was majestic in the man.

It is to their emptiness that we lift our hats ; to the place where the man is not.

The sudden absence, the unknown whereabouts are what make us awkward in the presence of the dead, and these, with that curious grief for the man's loss which we cannot measure, and that strange sorrow which springs from the sense of change, are what avert even the shadow of the comic spirit.

But with the wounded it is different. Each with

his agony is sufficiently affecting, and to succour each one would endure prodigies of discomfort; yet together they produce an effect irresistibly absurd. The sudden reduction of men in the pride of their strength to the pitiful weakness and impotence of a babe; creeping along the grass, with, perhaps, an infant's breathing wail, or groaning like a stricken beast, often with no visible hurt upon them, makes war look all at once so supremely ridiculous, that one wonders how it has so long evaded abolition by man's sense of dignity.

True, wounds are honourable wearing; they are, as Stephen Crane did not quite put it, the red badge of somebody's courage. But no reflections can make the sudden feeble helplessness of the wounded seem other than pathetically absurd; tragically absurd, if you please, that men should still endeavour to reduce each other to such a ridiculous condition, and forthwith do their utmost to restore the hurt to health. In old fights we do not hear much of the wounded; the victor finished up what was left on the battlefield. That was logical: our present methods are not: hence the absurdity.

But when one passes from the field to the field hospital, from the scent of flesh to that of iodoform, the absurdity vanishes in the presence of pain. Under those trees by the Modder where the wounded of Paardeberg lay, many of them without shelter from the sun or dew, with but a blanket between their wounded limbs and the ground, there was no suggestion of comedy. The ambulances had been cut down to a fifth of what is considered sufficient for the humane practice of war, and the biggest battle

of the campaign had been fought with but that fifth behind it. The result was, of course, deplorable. The doctors, whose rigid military training does not foster their capacity for adaptation, tried indefatigably to make the best of their resources ; but they could make very little.

The R.A.M.C. has not the medical training which makes great doctors, but it has the routine experience which makes pedants.

It has desired rank, seeing it had nothing else to look for ; and never did an ill-gift so justify its selection. The surgeon wished to be a major, and the tin gods have granted his request. He is a major, but he is often nothing else. The days may come when the tin gods will see that a sick army is an expensive luxury, and that it is cheaper to pay a surgeon whose glory is his surgery, than to pay a surgeon whose glory is his rank. The wounded man gets no comfort from the reflection that his arm was needlessly removed by a lieutenant-colonel.

The pitiable condition of the wounded at Paardeberg was not the doctors' fault : perhaps it was no one's fault, but an inevitable hardship of war.

It is absurd to lay down directions for transport without knowing the resources which condition it. As it is, more horses are following the army than can conveniently be fed ; and every additional nosebag must be filled from those that are already half empty, and adds to the leanness and incapacity of the horses on which our security depends.

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To-day all the wounded that could be moved were

sent away ; only cases too slight to need removal or too grave to stand it being kept with us.

Casualties are of daily occurrence—ten men going down in as many minutes this morning under the enemy's experiment in long range fire from Kitchener's Kopje—and the lack of hospital accommodation is required for these new-comers. Besides, the doctors say that the prospect of going down country brings immediate improvement even to those too badly wounded to endure the least movement. Any benefit from such optimism had probably worn off before they started.

The day is fiercely hot. The sun falls with a slap upon the hand stretched out into it from the shade. In the quivering radiation along the edge of the plateau the dark line of the artillery has disappeared ; but from hill to hill above Cronje's laager the helios sparkle with incessant speech, and now and then the heavy silence is broken by the bark of a gun and the dull explosion of its shell in the river valley.

Winding like a huge snake from the centre of the camp into the wavering mirage to the westward is a train of wagons. They have been assembling since dawn, and when the first arrived at the field hospital you could have grilled a chop upon its woodwork.

Rough, huge, heavy trek wagons they are, absolutely springless, used only for stores, which jolt the breath out of your body even when cushioned with a load of hay. They are now to carry eight hundred wounded, some riddled with bullet holes, many with broken bones still unknit, forty odd miles

at two miles an hour to Modder River over the ruin of a road. It is wonderful that the spirits of wounded men should rise at such a prospect.

The start is conceived in the most orderly fashion. Every cart has its prescribed occupants ; the name of each is called from a file of blue papers ; the cart when full of the right people is checked off, the order is given, the whips swing, the Kaffirs yell, and the long convoy of pain jolts ahead some forty yards leaving the next empty wagon before the hospital.

But this methodical collection and shipment of eight hundred men from a field hospital is no easy matter. It takes hours and hours. The tents cover a considerable space ; many of the wounded need help to get to the carts, some have to be carried. This perfection of method is often a great time consumer.

Suppose the man needed does not answer his name : the whole caravan stops for him. His name is passed from mouth to mouth, and shouted about among the trees. There is still no sign of him ; the sun beats down upon the loaded carts in the white and blazing road ; the wounded men that fill them droop in its rays like picked flowers ; they lean this way and that in shapes of despondent exhaustion. Meanwhile search is made for the missing unit. He had, perhaps, crawled to the roadway to wait his turn, and then, as hour after hour went by, dragged himself out of the sun and dust and fallen asleep under a tree. He is found and brought up at last, defending himself with dazed lassitude from the orderly's reproaches.

"Smith?" inquires the doctor, with his pencil against the name.

"Yes, sir."

"Lift him in," says the doctor. "Here! put a hand under that broken leg," he adds to the orderly, as the helpless limb swings downward and the man sobs pitifully.

"T. G. Smith?" enquires the doctor of the wagon more particularly, with his eye on the list before adding a tick.

"No, sir," gulps the man, "T. A. Smith."

"Lift him out again," exclaims the doctor irritably. "Where's T. G. Smith?"

"Think 'e died this morning, sir," suggests a bearer who has just come up.

"Go and see, and look sharp," says the doctor, and the man doubles off to a tent at the edge of the bush, turns over the four strange shapes that lie, sewn up in their brown blankets, on the floor of it, and then scurries on to the P.M.O.'s quarters for more complete identification.

So the work goes on, very slowly. And all day long that procession of pain stretches out further into the field, until it sweeps by evening in a great half-circle about the camp. Some of the men in the first wagons that were filled have already fainted, and others sunk to the floor like bundles of rags: and still the wounded are being lifted from limp heaps by the hospital into the wagons which remain.

It does seem as if the thing might be done more expeditiously, even to those of us who have been long inured to army medical method.

With just a little less of this dreary precision, a little more of human tenderness! Of course some one would grumble at the other end if T. A. Smith had travelled in T. G. Smith's seat. But then there always is a little muddle about the milk of human kindness; and in war, that sort of muddle matters so little, and that sort of milk counts for so much. But the numbing shadow of the barracks is over it all, and from that shadow even the humanest find it hard to emerge.

But, at last, towards evening, those poor things start, with three days' purgatory before them, their tired faces twitching at each jolt of the wheels. Some, half dead already, to die by the way; some to pay with a limb for that grievous journey; but all looking forward with unimaginable desire for—think of it!—the soothing mercy of a train. Conceive yourself, hurt almost mortally, yet in so bad a case that the expectation of a sweltering railway carriage from John o' Groats to the Land's End seems like a dream of Paradise, and, if you can conceive it—understand.

CHAPTER X

SURRENDER

PAARDEBERG, *February 27th.*

THERE is more in dramatic fitness than meets the eye. An unlooked-for appropriateness in the sequence of events comes to wear an air of destiny, to have an arranged effect. When the appropriateness accords with our desires we call it providential, Providence being for so many the fate which fits with what we wish. And since no occasion could have been more appropriate, the colour of Providence is sure to cling to the events that happened by the Modder on the anniversary of Majuba.

It was the Republic's hour. For twenty years of peace it had battered on its boast of victory. Now was the moment when those boasts should have inspired a greater victory, a more significant surrender. But it was the Republic which surrendered. The sound of celebration ran from the Orange River to the Limpopo, but the lips which were smiling at the memories of Majuba will be straightened by the news from Modder River, for, on the day that a

British force was beaten in that hollow hilltop, a Boer army was defiling from the bed of the Modder—without its arms.

No dishonour hangs on that defeat. The men who endured for ten days in the ravine of a river, from guns they could not answer, the shock of lyddite and the screech of shrapnel, and, worse almost than these, the stench of swollen carcasses and festering flesh, with small hope of relief and no chance to retaliate, have little cause to be ashamed.

We waited in wonderment at their endurance: watched the green fumes burst among their beasts, the flames break out on their wagons, the lead tear through their trees. The men who sat out that bombardment, even though they suffered from it but little, were no cowards, for the effects of a shell is on the mind rather than on the body.

True, there was dissension in the camp. Commandant Wolmarans was refused permission to leave the laager under pain of death, and Wolmarans is not especially representative of Free State feeling. That was five days after the bombardment began, and the day before it ended Commandant Roos sent a memorial to his chief regretting his inability from illness to attend a council of war held on the previous evening, and expressing the intention of his commando to surrender whether Cronje did so or not, since no advantage to their country or nation could come of their dying like rats in a trap. They would wait twenty-four hours in the hope of reinforcements arriving before giving effect to their decision, and during the night those brave men who wished might

endeavour to cut their way out. Failing that, on the morrow they would hoist the white flag.

Such were the elements under Cronje's hand. That he held them for ten days to his determination proves, if proof were needed, the man he is. His ability of that sort one can realise in a glance—that and others. His face is iron with his own resolve : hard from its lack of every malleable quality of imagination, rigid with personality.

There is no suggestion of relaxing, for there is no hint of tension ; the man might be impervious to feeling, and his features cut in stone. Square forehead, square shoulders, and square beard, there is a hint of roundness nowhere, no smoothing of an angle, no softening of a word. He has many deeds already to his credit, or to his discredit. It shall be remembered that he held 4,000 men for ten days under a hell of fire, half of whom at least would not otherwise have stayed there for an hour.

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There was a dramatic prelude to the last act of the drama. A sudden fierce peal of fire in the clear dark night. Then silence, in which one rubbed one's eyes and tried from the stars to gather the hours to go by till dawn. Then the patter of the rifles again, crackling like a flame that spreads about a thorn-bush ; and, across it, volleys in sharp quick spurts of sound. Bullets began to whistle silkily overhead, none knowing whence they came nor what was doing. The Boers, it was whispered, were breaking out in a last desperate sortie—the volleys certainly did not come from them—and we listened in the dark for the

sharper sounds of their bullets between our sleeping-places and the stars.

But the shots came no nearer ; and, after quickening into a brief furious fusillade, died away to stray reports and the rare slap of a volley. We turned over and slept till dawn, and shortly after came the great news. Cronje had surrendered !

The story of that night was a brave one enough. From their foremost trenches, five hundred yards from the enemy, the Canadians had advanced silently to within fifty. Their orders were to carry the trenches with the bayonet if they succeeded in surprising them ; failing that, to fall on their faces at the first shot and retire under cover of their supports, who had occupied an advanced position before the final attack began. The instructions were observed to the letter, no small test of a Volunteer force in a night manoeuvre, and when the first rifle opened on it the line fell prone without firing a shot in reply, though within tempting distance of its destination.

It retired, too, with absolute steadiness, covered by the fire of its supports and of the Shropshires, whose volleys, enfilading a possible advance of the Boers, were admirable.

The retreat cost thirteen lives and over thirty wounded, but the night's work, of which it formed a part, left the Boer trenches untenable, and Cronje with no alternative but to surrender.

There was nothing in that event to fix the eye. No courtly yielding of a sword, no ordered laying down of arms and tragic marching of a beaten army.

The man who for so long had foiled the best which we could send against him came with his escort, riding a sorry-looking cob, wearing a slouch hat, a worn green overcoat, and frieze trousers. Whip in hand, he looked like nothing so much as a Welsh farmer going round his stock.

Though big by no means, his bulk and breadth made him seem so beside the little man who advanced to meet him as he dismounted, the little man who is known by his pet name to every soldier, and loved by thousands who have never seen him. No more effective contrast could have been desired. The one a soldier by every glance of his eye, every turn of his head, every trifle of his attire ; keen, just, gentle, a touchstone of valour, a byword for kindness. The other—a Boer.

The two shook hands and sat talking under the trees of the river ; the mounted escort in front of them, two lines of kilted Highlanders completing the square. The lean spectacled interpreter on one side ; on the other the commander of the greatest army of Greater Britain, grave, attentive, courteous ; between them Cronje, square, repellent, the narrow eyes averted ; for all the world like a sulky emperor.

There was a contrast as effective when the long line of prisoners began to crawl across the veld. Tommy's khaki after four months' campaigning is not a feature that would attract recruits, but it was scarlet and gold beside the kit of the men he guarded. In weird loose weary-looking garments, which might have belonged to any but the one who

wore them ; carrying parcels, billies, teapots, and bottles ; some under umbrellas and some in goloshes ; they seemed a trail, or a trek, as would be said out here, of valetudinarian tramps. Very few were despondent.

"Ah," said one, on the morning of the surrender, to an officer of the Essex Regiment, who had been his prisoner for a week, "it's all right for us now we're taken, but you'll have to go back and fight."

They had treated their prisoners, it must be said, with great kindness ; sharing equally their own scant food, and putting them as far as possible in a place of safety—no easy matter. Commandant Roos was especially considerate ; and those of our men so unfortunate as to share that week's bombardment with the enemy formed a high opinion of their captors.

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The trenches, which had proved so impervious to our fire, were very interesting. It was difficult to trace in their outline any military design, or even a wilful divergence from and improvement on the accepted patterns. Nor did there seem to be any systematic attempt to provide a cross or flanking fire to cover dead angles. They might have been drawn by a man with no military knowledge, but they could only have been dug by experts in war. Very narrow—in some of them a broad man could scarcely have turned his shoulders—very short and very deep, they offered the meagrest opportunities to shell fire that can be conceived. They were burrows rather than trenches, cut with extraordinary squareness to a

depth sometimes of over six feet, and with shelves scooped out three and four feet below the surface in which a man could lie secure from anything which did not burst inside his burrow. Long dead-heads of earth broke the lines of the trenches, and, through these, tunnels were carried by which a man might creep from one end to the other. The earth was thrown up equally on either side, and an occasional sort of private box trench holding two or three was dug here and there immediately behind the first, the object of which was not apparent. A domestic air was given to the whole by the portmanteaus and tin boxes, sunk in small square pits behind the trenches, the cover flush with the ground.

The domestic suggestion was very prominent when from these boxes the shirts, coats, collars, socks, Bibles, and boots were scattered about between the black cooking-pots, heaps of grey ashes, and lumps of brown meat in the hour of our occupation. Clearly the Boer makes himself at home even on the battle-field, though his outfit was sometimes pathetically inadequate. A pair of new patent leather shoes seemed to need explaining. But perhaps they had been brought for triumphal entries.

The laager itself was a curious and horrible spectacle. The majority of the wagons were but little damaged, but about a dozen were reduced to medleys of burnt iron. The four tires of the wheels, the axles, the bolts, the nuts, all the metal bones, lay one above the other in the space of ashes as the fire had loosed them from the burning wood. One of the burnt wagons had held potatoes, but, curiously enough,

the heat had not proved sufficient to cook them perfectly.

But the chief feature of the laager was its smell. Camping on battlefields one becomes acclimatised to the scent of death. But no human soul could have grown used to the reek of that slaughter-house. It was appalling. Shrapnel had scattered the bodies of beasts; lyddite had turned them inside out. Cattle, twisted out of the likeness of kine, stripped to a red and skinless horror, rent into mounds of broken pieces, lay on every hand and had lain there for a week, under a sun that turns meat sour almost between the plate and the mouth.

One looked the other way from the things one saw, but, unfortunately, one cannot smell the other way as well; and one left that field of pestilence with the conclusion either that the Boers were a heroic people or that they had no noses.

Perhaps some little interest may attach to the overtures which preceded the surrender. They began with a request on the 19th from General Cronje for twenty-four hours' armistice to bury his dead, attend to his wounded, and send them to a place of safety. A reply, nominally from General French, promised that no attack should be made on the laager until an answer had been received from the general officer commanding the British forces in South Africa to General Cronje's request. Meanwhile, seeing that his troops were entirely surrounded, surrender was counselled in order that peace might reign in the land.

Lord Roberts's answer refused any grace of time, and demanded unconditional surrender.

To this Cronje replied: "Since you are so unmerciful as not to accord me the time asked for nothing remains for me to do but as you wish." This is the debatable message, and, because the point of misunderstanding is not so easy to appreciate in English, it may be given in the original as well: "Daar Uw zoo onbarmhartig zyt om mij de gevraagde tijd niet te geven blijft mij niet anders over te doen zoo als Uw wenscht."

In acknowledging this Lord Roberts requested the general to return to his camp with Captain Liebmann, the intermediary for negotiation, and added that he considered him to have acted in a most humane manner, for which he honoured him.

To this Cronje replied: "There appears to be a great mistake in your lordship's mind. What I really said was—Since you are so unmerciful as not to accord me the time asked for, nothing remains for me to do. Do as you wish. During my lifetime I shall never surrender. If you wish to bombard, fire away. I have spoken!" The only answer to that was, of course, the guns, and it was a speedy one.

The remaining correspondence was a letter on the 21st from Lord Roberts promising a safe conduct to the women and children in the laager, of whose presence he had just been made aware, and offering medical assistance to the Boer wounded. The safe conduct was declined, and the assistance only accepted provisionally—the doctors to remain in the Dutch camp until it was shifted.

This was, of course, refused. Then Cronje suggested a hospital for his wounded 1,000 yards west of

his laager, where they could be attended by English doctors. But with limited accommodation for our own wounded, this was out of the question. A further letter from Lord Roberts ascertained the fact that besides two officers and ten men, unwounded prisoners in the Boer laager, there were one officer, one non-commissioned officer and two men who had been hurt. The general proposed to send these four with four Boer wounded to the German Red Cross Society's hospital at Jacobsdal, the Boers to be free when cured. To this Cronje consented.

There the correspondence ends.

CHAPTER XI

COMPARISONS

OSFONTEIN, *March 6th.*

ART and War! Who has the temerity still to speak of them together, which not even by their contrasts can be compared? Beneath me, behind a red-brown anthill, a figure in khaki is lying with his cheek against his rifle, his eye along the sights. There is a lump of ironstone 900 yards in front of him on the lower slope of a kopje, and under it a man whom he is trying to kill. He knows nothing of the man but that he wears a grey felt hat and has a pretty style in shooting, for the anthill has been three times struck. The man knows probably even less of him. They move in ordinary circumstances 7,000 miles apart; have not an interest nor even a quarrel in common. One lives in Chelsea, the other on the veld. Each has, perhaps, his share of the virtues, makes a good woman happy, and does his duty by the State. With less space between them, and no supply of cartridges, they might be the best of friends. Now each desires only the other's end.

A little more right allowance in that last shot for wind, and the man on the kopje would be lying quiet among its stones, and none would know where he lay nor what had befallen him but the vultures who turned his face upward next morning to pick out his eyes.

But that is the inevitable incongruity of war, the effect of enmity without its existence. "Wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword," said the writer of Job, but the punishments of the sword do not always bring wrath. Men can be made to slay each other without that inducement.

Lying not far beyond that figure in khaki is a black patch. The grey-green scrub almost conceals it, all but two queer dark wisps like the talons of a bird, clenched and turned upwards. They are the hands of a man. Beneath them, looking upward also, is the face of a Kaffir. One knows it to be a face by its position, but the shrapnel which passed through it has made it a mass of black and red with no human resemblance. The figure in khaki holds his nose when the wind passes his way over it. There is a little heap of potatoes beside the swollen body, which it was gathering when war came by. That also is an inevitable incongruity: the doom of the peaceful. One accepts it with the other. War is this sort of thing—blind, senseless, indiscriminate. It is, also, after a fashion, worse than that.

There is out there, spread over the thorns of a mimosa, what was once a man. No one who sees it as he passes looks at it again. The smear of

yellow on what is left speaks to lyddite. That may seem to the novice the worst side of war. It is not really. The mind hugs it unwillingly, perhaps, and shudders. Memory cannot drop it by the way. It lends a horror to one's dreams. But in war it is merely a gruesome incident, a common one, possibly, but an incident always, not an atmosphere.

The atmosphere is very different. One breathes it here, where the bullets are flying over with their strange soft cry, and the bitter reek of the dead is mixed with dust and the faint scent of flowers; mixed, too, it may be, with the memory of that long shallow trench beyond the camp, where the brown-kneed Highlanders lie stiff in their gay hose and kilts beside the still figures in khaki.

It is in that air that Art sounds so strange a note that it seems but an echo from another world.

This is no figure of speech. To think steadfastly here of an art—of the soul of an art—is to wrench one's mind suddenly from the scene before one into the world of ideas, is to effect a shuddering change of personality almost painful and quite impossible to describe.

One must live first in this bare empty land, with life grown cheap, and death always about one; with friends buried at night that shared one's biscuit in the morning, friends whose long fondness is forgotten in to-morrow's battle, and remembered later with an intolerable smart; with destruction and victory only in one's thoughts, and the ruin and foulness of an army round one—it is in these one must be steeped to realise how far one has come; so

far, so far, that vision, and thought, and beauty seem left behind one in another world.

Take music, for instance ; music which is so much the soldier's servant, the scullerymaid of war, washing our soiled memories with a cheerful tune, to bring us home forgetting. Remember, too, how often the military idea has been its inspiration. Music, if any of the arts, should have a word out here.

There is a great symphony written in honour of a great soldier ; that, at any rate, should be in consonance with a fighting mood.

That symphony does not, of course, compete in the soldier mind with the tunes of comic opera, but it is as near the noise of camps as the soul of music can go. Well, it is a curious experience to try under these bullets to hum over any movement of the 'Eroïca.' The effort seems, with a most extraordinary strain, almost to dualise one's consciousness. It is impossible to be here and there at once. Probably it is useless to express these things. The last word on every subject is written from an armchair, and it is many miles from ease that such things are. Here, anyway, is a man's word on the subject, who once was a soldier and knows something of the arts, to whom this incongruity was at one time just as incredible, as it will be, no doubt, to-day to those who read him.

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We have shifted camp ; the rain has fallen ; the laager no longer taints the air ; the river with its horrible burdens is out of sight. One speaks of the sickness which dogs an army, but how little it is to what it might be. The flood of last Friday brought

past the camp the putrefying carcasses of two hundred horses, and we had been drinking of that water for a week. It held, too, worse things than horses. There were bodies of another kind. Bathing below the headquarter camp one day before the flood, in a reach which had, unknown to me, been set apart for other uses, I was taken off my legs by something that passed between them.

A grab, as I went under, filled my hand with a man's beard, and at the same moment an orderly appeared on the bank to apprise me that the water in which I was had been reserved for drinking. One needed no official persuasion to curtail one's bath, but it struck one that where the dead were being washed the living could add little in the way of pollution.

How many of the enemy went down that way one does not know, and the Boer loss at Paardeberg can never be more than guessed. It was doubtless much larger than their confession, much smaller than our estimate. A shallow grave is reported this morning to have been discovered containing sixty dead. If so, the total of killed may have reached one hundred ; probably it was less, for the best gauge of its insignificance seems to be the determination with which the position was held. Even Cronje could hardly have kept together men sick of fighting in the face of heavy slaughter.

It was bad, in the hour of victory, to face the pale women and children one had been hammering all the week. We were left without choice in the matter, but that did not save one from a sense of shame,

especially when seeing them. There was a girl with her arm in a stained sling, and a red scar on a face white as its big sun-bonnet.

Tommy's treatment of these poor women folk was of the tenderest. He is always a dear good fellow on such occasions. A big Australian kissed all the babies and shook hands with those who carried them. He did it with the indulgence of a man long deprived of such a pleasure, and the women seemed quite to understand.

There is little satisfaction and much that is painful in this fighting of a nation in arms. There was such an air of domestic interruption about that surrender.

That laager, but for its unspeakable odour, was less like a camp than a pillaged hamlet. The trivialities of clothing thrown about—a woman's scarf, a boy's gay waistcoat, even a baby's pair of socks. The Bibles, the children's copy books, the scattered letters. One of these, read for information and not from curiosity, ended pathetically: "And so I say farewell to you with a pen, but not with my sad heart."

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The bombardment at Koedoesrand still further readjusted one's views on shell fire in the open. Careful observation of the shell-bursts and a minute examination of the ground covered disabused largely the confidence which guns inspire. A charge of lyddite from the 4.7, bursting in the midst of a dozen cattle feeding loosely together, might perhaps knock one or two over, but the rest would go on with their meal. There was, of course, a lot of cattle killed in

the ten days' shooting, but there were too many guns to the bag. The damage done to the trenches was inappreciable; that in the river-bed was very slight. About a tenth of the wagons were burnt, and as many more badly injured; but one would have expected to accomplish the total mischief in a single afternoon.

One of our own men, a prisoner, who was compelled to sit out the bombardment, describes it as "at times extremely unpleasant." If that is all that can be looked for from 100 lbs. of lyddite it is clear that, with the right kind of cover and in the wrong kind of country, big guns will not have much to say.

CHAPTER XII

DISAPPOINTMENT

POPLAR GROVE, MODDER RIVER, *March 8th.*

CLEAR though the night was and roofed with stars, its darkness made the finding of a veld track impossible, and hid all hollows of the ground in an indistinguishable shade.

The Cavalry Division had gone out into it at 2 a.m. : vague and silent squadrons of horse, with a muffled beat of hoofs, the dull clomp on bridles, the ring of a stirrup. They had come in on the previous evening for the great fight, and lay under the hill beyond the aloes of the garden fence, a dark mass of horses and seven batteries of guns. Their camp-fires made the hillside gay under the young moon with jets of orange flame.

Now the moon was down, and the men and horses were lost in the night. The faint sound of their movement died away, the silence and darkness fell about them—the silence and darkness which are so still and so deep in this wide and quiet land.

An hour later the Sixth Division followed. Compressed to the most compact dimensions, battalion

after battalion groped its way out into the veld and disappeared ; but it was slow progress.

In the east came the faint lambent whiteness of the zodiacal light, but its pulses only dimmed the stars. Then the pale colour of the false dawn stirred our hopes of day, but rendered marching none the easier ; making the veld seem blacker as it rose towards the sky, and confusing one's sense of surface.

But the two brigades pushed slowly onward, each part almost literally in touch with the other, till the true dawn grew, and beneath it could be seen the ghostly gray masses of the moving column.

At that hour the veld is at its wettest and freshest and sweetest. The scrub is silvered with a drenching dew, and the coming day draws out its damps scented with tansy and wild sage and thyme. Really, with a fuller acquaintance, one grows fond of the veld. Since the rain little flowers are coming out on it, lemon yellows and pale heliotropes mostly, making no show of colour, but giving to its stern sameness a faint friendly air, and the birds are companionable and unfrightened ; and, if they have no song, have the happiest chirrup.

One grows, at any rate, to interpret the appeal this country might make to its own people, and that is something to one's unsympathetic soul.

At dawn, with a scented stillness, and at evening, with sunsets gorgeous in unimagined splendours, that appeal is strongest. One feels it through all one's craving of contest and one's sadness for the dead.

* * * * *

With daybreak the Sixth Division, pushing on

more quickly, were astonished to find the cavalry just ahead.

General French, always a cautious soldier, had declined to take the risks of the dark against an unknown enemy, occupying ill-defined positions on a front of some fourteen miles, though he had Burnham, the Canadian scout, as guide, to whom night offers no difficulties, and who had covered all the country in the dark. After-events led one to believe that the General regarded it as part of his mission to extend a supporting hand to the division on his left. Anyhow, when everything seemed to hang on his swinging swiftly round to the eastward and obtaining command of the Bloemfontein road, he remained on the right of the Sixth Division, oscillating forward and backward, keeping in touch with the enemy, and permitting a few hundred men with a couple of guns so fatally to delay the advance of his command that the safety of the Boer main body was never seriously threatened.

Blame is bred of disappointment, and always there are unknown factors in the other man's fight for which allowance must be made.

But—and it is the but of a bitter disappointment—the enemy escaped; escaped, because the palpable way of escape was left open, and escaped, too, in so disorganised a condition that the closure of that road, even by an inferior force, would have resulted in a surrender even more important than that of the week before.

So wide and complex was the ground covered, so involved the Boer position, that it is impossible

without a map to give an intelligible survey of the operations.

Facing east towards Bloemfontein the river and road together formed a boundary on the left, beyond which was the Ninth Division, with Smith-Dorrien's brigade on the outer flank, facing the Boer right on a big table-shaped kopje. On the hither bank was General Tucker, with one brigade of the Seventh Division, and in front of him the Boer centre, entrenched along several rounded kopjes. To the rear of those was open country, till one reached the left of the Boer position, which rested on a couple of low ridges and a clump of small stony kopjes known as the Seven Sisters. The Sixth Division was to sweep round the Sisters, herding up the Boers who held them towards the enclosing arms of the Seventh and Ninth, while General French shut out all hope of escape to the east.

It was a beautifully planned fight, worthy of the great soldier who conceived it, and owed none of its ill-success to him.

A little more daring, a completer conception by the executants of their place in the plan, and a paralysing success would have been achieved.

Risks were run, of course, as risks must be. If the Boer centre had dared to attack the advanced brigade of the Seventh, things would have looked ugly. On the other hand, had Macdonald pushed his right along the river, thus supporting Tucker on the other bank, that general would most undoubtedly have used the support to compromise effectively the retreat of the Boer centre, and inflict considerable loss. But

the Ninth took its own work somewhat too seriously, and, absorbed in that, failed to co-operate.

But the real failure was on the further side.

On the right a day of hard and barren marching fell to the Sixth Division. They started shortly after three, and for ten hours tramped after a foe whom they never saw.

It was a heartbreaking piece of work, but as a spectacle it was superb.

No peace manœuvre could have been carried out with a quality so picturesque or a more astonishing precision.

Extended to its widest front, its lines mere dotted indications in khaki, it changed front four times in the course of its advance, moving E. by S., S. by E., S.W. and E., clearing kopjes, mounting ridges, pouring through neks, dropping into dongas, yet maintaining its formation with the most wonderful exactness. The ground lent itself to spectacle. Each low roll of veld hid in turn the whole force from view, and then offered to the eye on its further slope the entire array in its imposing magnitude.

On the right, dark as pine groves in the valleys, and like the ridges of a forest along the hills, were 5,000 horsemen and seven batteries of guns. It was the finest sight which the war has so far afforded, but, unfortunately, it was not a battle.

Time was lost, when time was everything, by too elaborate precaution; and the success of the enveloping movement was sacrificed to an excess of care.

Frontal changes with a division in extended

order demand an immense sacrifice of time, and impose on the outer flank a vast amount of tedious marching.

In this instance we made a sweep of many miles, and expended some quantity of lyddite to clear a ridge held by no more than a hundred men. It was a fine piece of bluff on their part, and they may well boast of having held up a division of British infantry for an hour and a half.

But we paid dear for it, and the lives spent in a more daring reconnaissance would have been lost to good purpose. Yet with our post out here in front of us, and the ready and ridiculous strictures of unmilitary critics on every expenditure which is not crowned with success, who can blame a commander for his excess of caution?

But the slow progress of the Sixth was of small importance beside the wasteful impotence of the Cavalry Division. If, as is said, its horses were tired, the more need to have taken them straight to a destination. The hours lost by timidity in the night were not only never regained, but the same spirit of irresolution seemed to settle more obstructively upon its movements as the day went on. Apart from the utter absence of dash which might have swept opposition away and have added President Kruger to the spoils of battle, one could notice the damning influence of the 'white weapon,' the desire to keep the pack together, in order, at some magnificent moment, which never came, to let its weight be felt. Had the cavalry been handled as mounted infantry, the hillsides which held it up for the better part of

the morning could have been carried in half an hour.

A great opportunity was wasted, a great success foregone, a piece of perfect planning and of exquisite calculation came to nothing. But in every battle it is inevitable that such things may happen.

Those all too ready with censure should have been here to witness how the great little man who leads us took the upset of his conception, and the vanishing of an action which might have left the Free State at his feet.

He stood there with the quiet smile on his face, when many another man would have been mad with anger, knowing well where the blame should be laid, but speaking not a word of it as he twisted his moustache.

"In war you can't expect everything to come out right," was all he had to say about the blunder, and in the strength of that smiling silence lies the greatness which we revere.

CHAPTER XIII

A SOLDIER'S BATTLE

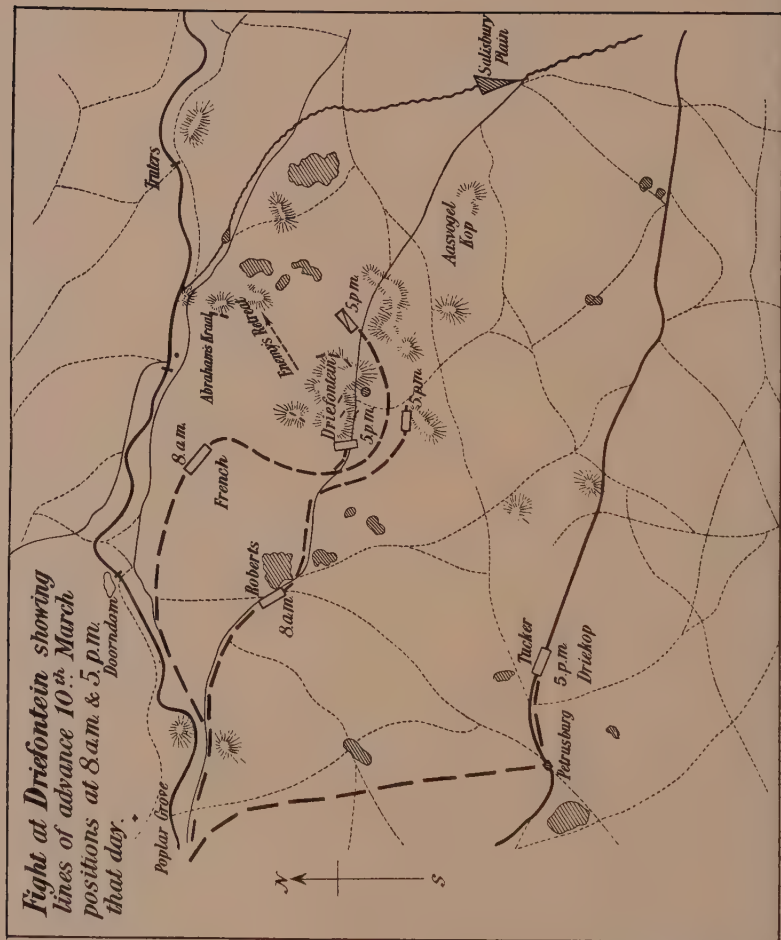
DRIEFONTEIN, *March 11th.*

HAD the unwritten rule of sport been observed, which forbids any gun's interference with the birds in front of the next in line, the action at Driefontein would have been brought to a much more acceptable conclusion.

There were three guns in that affair—the left, centre, and right columns of Lord Roberts's army. The bird rose between the left and centre, but rather nearer the centre. The left was somewhat ahead, and was thus entitled to the first shot, the centre getting the second if the bird went down the line. But the left, instead of shooting from where it was, worked in between the bird and the centre, thus making a shot impossible for the latter, and leaving the bird a clear line of escape covered by no gun: which it took, being a bird with an eye to such little matters.

It is nearly always difficult to describe a position. That of the Boers at Driefontein took, roughly, the shape of a trefoil, the sort of trefoil that a tyro

*Fight at Driefontein showing
lines of advance 10th March
positions at 8 a.m. & 5 p.m.
that day.*



skates, with the ends left wide open. The Boers occupied the inside of the trefoil, which formed a low plateau, edged here and there with little kopjes, the ground falling on all sides to dry pans or level ground. The curves of the trefoil faced south-west south-east, and north-east. Approaching from the north-west, a force could have attacked its open ends, but the Boers had guarded against that contingency by placing a Creusot with their main body nearly due north, on a commanding hill at Abraham's Kraal, whose fire swept the easy ground which seemed to beckon an attack.

The advance of the Sixth Division would have led it naturally across this ground, and into the back of the trefoil, had not the gun opened on its approaching columns. Unaware of the enemy's exact position, lured by the appearance of cover on its right, the cavalry of the division swung round, the infantry followed. The Boers had succeeded in steering General French away from their own line of retreat and into the very position from which they desired to be attacked, and against which they had prepared defences.

That was not the worst of it, for, in bringing his left shoulder up, French had interposed his force between the Boers and Lord Roberts, thus not only losing his chance of squeezing the enemy between the two columns, but putting the central one practically out of action.

The mistake was a serious one. In defence, it must be urged that French's orders were to avoid serious detention by the enemy, and to keep in touch

with the central column. To advance along his original line necessitated an attack on Abraham's Kraal. That meant time. It meant also permitting the intervention of an unknown force between himself and the centre.

His error seemed one of over-caution, like that which spoilt the day at Poplar Grove.

There it is with its excuses; and the excuses of timidity have, be it remembered, greater weight in the balance in front of the enemy than when reasoned out the day after, and commendable daring has very often an air of rashness when one does it in the dark.

Driefontein would make an excellent example of a battle as it is not described in the text-books. It is an object-lesson in that very numerous class of fights which fight themselves. The misdirected momentum once given, the thing has to work itself out to its aimless end.

The two maps will show better than words how the misdirection arose, and what was paid for it.

To tell the story of the fight as it appeared at the time to our ignorance will perhaps give really the most clear impression.

Advancing with the cavalry scouts of Lord Roberts's Division we heard, at about 8 a.m., artillery firing on our left front. Pushing ahead we could see a dark body of horse in the shelter of a kopje crowning the ridge to our left, and the white puffs of the enemy's shells bursting over it.

We cantered up the hill and climbed the stony crown of the kopje, but from its top little information

could be gathered of the enemy's position. His gun by Abraham's Kraal was still firing on the Sixth Division, which was swinging away to the southward out of range. To the eastward a gun firing black powder was dropping shells over our heads.

They were bursting high and doing no damage, and the Scots Greys, Carabiniers, and New South Wales Lancers were pushed forward under shelter of the kopje in front, with a battery of Horse Artillery, which unlimbered there and came into action.

It was a dull artillery duel, for the enemy was keeping his infantry position dark, and we could merely pound away at the white bursts of his gun across the ridge, with small hope of hitting it. His shells were still exploding over us, good in direction but too high, and doing very little harm. Then, after hours of weary expectation, the order came to detach part of the cavalry to turn the enemy's left flank. It was the wrong flank and the wrong moment, but anything was better than inaction. A company of Mounted Infantry led the way, followed shortly by two squadrons of the Greys and Carabiniers.

The enemy had no doubt divined the destination of the first body, and as the Greys cantered down the slope he opened on us with a Krupp and a 'pom-pom.' The 'pom-pom,' as the Boers use it, is an overrated weapon; it clearly needs a lot of handling, but even without that it is suggestive.

A string of seven little shells burst with their air of furious humour all about us, but only one

man and one horse were hit. The canter very perceptibly quickened, and the second string tore harmlessly through the sand behind us; a bad waste of powder, since we must have offered an easy mark.

Once we had left the ridge uncertainty seemed to beset our movements. We swung round the centre lobe of the trefoil, drawing a desultory rifle fire, which hit no one, and moved on to the north-eastern curve in the hope of turning it.

But our hopes were disappointed. The enemy had mounted a gun in the entering angle, and shelled us from one position to another.

It was a humiliating experience, for, with the exception of two or three squadrons which had made a dash for shelter right up under the crest, we numbered, by three o'clock, almost the entire 1st Cavalry Brigade.

The enemy had at the most, in that last lobe of the trefoil, a couple of Krupp guns about the calibre of our Field Artillery, and a Vickers-Maxim, which they scarcely used. What infantry was there is impossible to say, but only a few hundred rounds were fired.

Yet those two guns, with some merely tolerable shooting, kept a cavalry brigade at bay for three hours. Of course, if men are kept under even tolerably good shell fire a few are lost, but, on the other hand, if a tired brigade is being continually moved in and out of range, the entire body goes for nothing at the critical moment.

We went for nothing, chiefly because we worked



FIGHT AT DRIEFONTEIN. ACTION OF THE NORTHERN COLUMN

without a definite objective, lost irretrievable time, in consequence, waiting on occasion, and rode horses wearied by continual movements which did not lead forward.

The work performed by the brigade in zigzags would have carried it right beyond the enemy's flank, and the guns which inconvenienced it would have been silenced automatically by a straightforward advance, since they would have been withdrawn for safety. But *finesse* in tactics has not been a feature of our cavalry manœuvres.

By slow degrees we worked round the third lobe of the trefoil, and there the last Boer gun opened, on the extreme left of their position, from a kraal in the centre of a group of red houses, each protected by a white flag.

It was a curious sight, no doubt unwittingly ironical, the bursts of white smoke amid the fluttering squares of white calico. Our R.H.A. battery returned the fire and made good shooting, dropping its shells into the kraal, and spattering its walls with shrapnel, but the gun, undaunted, kept up its end as long as needed to cover the retreat of the men behind it.

The instant it was withdrawn, a company of Mounted Infantry, lying under the crest, made a dash for the kraal, almost while our last shell was bursting over it, but they arrived four minutes too late.

The gun was gone.

The Cavalry Brigade, wide on the plain, then continued its turning movement. But the sun was already down, the day was over, the opportunity lost.

The fight on the east of the position had been a disheartening failure.

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Meanwhile, on the left, an infantry fight was proceeding, of which somewhat earlier there had seemed not the least likelihood. The enemy's riflemen had lain on the long ridge behind their sangars all day without firing a shot; though the cavalry, in crossing the slope, had offered them a tempting target.

So completely deceptive was their silence that General French sent word to the commander of the Sixth Division to push on at once, as the enemy had retired.

General Kelly-Kenny thereupon rode forward with his staff up to the kopjes on the west of the position, and over the ridge in full view of the waiting Boers. He was greeted with a fusillade which should have grounded every man and horse in the little group.

It left them, however, practically untouched, though none of them is ever likely to experience a warmer five minutes.

After so rude an awakening, and considering that the division was advancing in complete security, it is not wonderful that the infantry deployment for attack was not faultlessly regular.

The Welsh were the first to open out, under shelter of the kopjes, having the Buffs on their right in more exposed ground, which proved a good deal too open for their liking. It was the Welsh, however, who bore the brunt of the shooting, and were so much knocked about that the Buffs went past them, taking their reserve ammunition.

By this time the Essex were up on the left, going straight for the point of the ridge, losing heavily, but never hanging for an instant, and the Yorks were beginning to come up on the Buffs' right.

Open to the entire attention of the enemy the old 3rd, however, could make no headway across the last four hundred yards of the ascent. They were losing even as they lay, and had small chance of returning the enemy's fire effectively.

Then at the critical moment, the Essex gained the point of the ridge, and went over it with a yell. The stone sangars along its top lay open to their advance, and the Boers behind them, robbed of cover, did not remain an instant to contest it.

The Essex had come in behind the steel, but the Buffs were before them. The instant the fire had slackened in front of them the leading companies were on their feet, though with every combatant officer down, and only led by their colour-sergeants.

But that leading was of the best, and the first men over the crest got home with the bayonet.

"It was a beast of a time," said one man who went through it; "we crawled half the way, with only that long grass to hide us thick with streaks of lead. Till those chaps jumped up in front of us we hadn't seen a man nor the flash of a rifle."

The streaks of lead made little difference to the advance, though the red mounds in the grass next morning with the lonely helmets over them proved how close they came together.

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The path of such a progress tells next day its silent

story. Not alone by those spaces of new-turned earth that wear only the badge of the regiment's honour, telling by name or burgeon that here and here it left its dead, but by the dark stiff fragments of the first-aid bandages, the red-stained scraps of newspaper pressed in vain against a wound, a boot still slimy with the blood which filled it, a water-bottle with the stuff that dripped on its felt. These and worse, and the worst the least noticeable—the claw marks, where desperate fingers tried to drag the wounded body along the ground into some sort of safety, or those deeper scars where the booted toes dug out their groaning agony into the grass.

That gives one a better conception of the battle than pictures of charging men. Modern fighting is mostly a crawl. The legendary order of Waterloo will have to be amended: 'Down, Guards, and at them!' is the new injunction. The old curse of the serpent is become the soldier's watchword: 'Upon thy belly shalt thou go!'

But the old valour and the old glory stay. The men of the Essex went over the ridge in a fashion to make hearts leap with envy which were not with them.

The hill was long and thick with tangled grass, the edge of the enemy's sangars were red coronets of fire; but nothing could stay them, and nothing that was Boer by nature would stay for them.

The old ruse had been tried already with a measure of success. Some Boers had leaped up on the skyline, their rifles slung over their shoulders, their hands above their heads, and when our men rose to the whistle had shot them down.

The ruse was repeated on the right, but this time it was the Boers who were shot, and those who were not raced for their horses and rode for their lives.

The Essex men came in behind the steel, but no one had stayed for the bayonet ; and so, an hour before darkness fell, the long ridge was won.

Honour must be given to all the men who took it, since all paid dear for their share of victory. We lost over 400 out of action, and buried 100 of our foes.

Beside other actions of the war that at Driefontein may seem a small one ; but Bloemfontein was abandoned because of it, and it may prove to be the last battle fought on Free State soil.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MARCHES OF A MONTH

BLOEMFONTEIN, *March 16th.*

THE full moon! How, even with a calendar beside one, the full moon dates the issue of our days! More, so much more, than the new! To that we turn our money and take our wishes, but its thin crescent does not seem to impress remembrance as does the other's great silver seal.

The full moon is the moon of festival, the moon of lovers, the moon of memories.

A month ago it rose, huge, red, and misshapen in the hot veil of dust across the Modder, after the first sharp fight of the new campaign.

Men were lying in the darkness of the kopje in front of us, dead and dying, and the stretcher bearers were feeling their way gingerly through the fallen twilight in fear of stepping on something that was not yet a body.

So strange in form and colour was that shape in the sky that one of the bearers, with nerves none too steady after fifteen hours' fighting, and the enemy

still perhaps within hearing, started when he caught sudden sight of it, and whispered back across the stained length of canvas, "My God, it's the moon!"

Between that moon and this—what a change! One watched that rise on the veld, with a saddle for a pillow and a horse tethered to one's belt; with a battle fought which only darkness had ended, its outcome unknown, its dead unburied: the first fight in England's latest effort to assert her supremacy! But this disc of silver rises in the purple east over a garden scented with bush verbena, with honey-sweet scabious, and a trailing white-tasseled creeper redolent of May. In the market-place, beyond the cupola of the Raadsaal, a British band is playing airs to which, not so very long ago, one danced at home—airs that only breathe of ease.

For this is Bloemfontein, the capital of a country at whose shut doors we had sat for five long months. Now in one brief moon we are in the midst of it.

The change is complete; from vacillation to fulfilment, from despondency to triumph; and the way it was wrought is most instructive.

It is the story of a plan, so complete, so resourceful, that persistent failures in detail were powerless to wreck it. The plan was in two parts. The first carried the army in a great wheel rearwards from Modder River village to Paardevaal Drift, sucking, as though by the draught of a whirlwind, Cronje out of his Magersfontein trenches and leaving Kimberley without assailants.

That was the first part, and such the subtlety of its conception and the accuracy of its execution that one

of the problems of the war was solved with scarcely a life lost or a shot fired.

Yet, already, tactical details had miscarried. The force which had held the Magersfontein ridges since December, a force of nearly six thousand men and over five miles of wagons, was allowed to slip away unnoticed.

By an accident its presence was discovered, and only by another was its identity disclosed.

Thus was evolved the fight at Klip Kraal, which began as a Mounted Infantry skirmish, developed into a brilliant rearguard action, and lasted fifteen hours.

With it, and the march that followed it, the first part ended; leaving Cronje trapped in the Modder with his enemies on every side.

The position was a tribute to what strategy can accomplish; but that accomplishment was more significantly apparent in the second period which was fruitful in tactical mistakes.

They commenced with the action at Paardeberg, which was an attempt to draw a badger from his hole by thrusting one's arm into it.

Personally one does not make such experiments, vicariously one does. Paardeberg was Lord Kitchener's first experience of the bullet end of modern rifle fire. The cartridge end he had seen at Omdurman. How much even a clever man's perceptions depend upon the point of view was shown by his attempt to push two divisions of infantry across ground which afforded no cover against a tenacious enemy perfectly concealed and unshaken by bombardment.

The result was—Paardeberg. It lost us many hundred men, it gained us nothing. Nothing, at least, that artillery would not have accomplished. That was mistake the first.

Cronje surrendered, the camp was moved.

Another fight was planned at Osfontein. A fight perfectly elaborated, precisely timed, against an enemy occupying positions of great strength which he had been fortifying for a fortnight.

The subtle strategy again set the enemy flying before a shot was fired, but tactical deficiencies lost the chief advantage of the day. The cavalry, wearied with needless movement, suffered itself to be delayed an hour at the critical moment by the mere ghost of opposition. The enemy escaped, and took his guns with him. That was mistake the second.

The third, at Driefontein, missed the opportunity, which was in part accidental, of crushing the enemy between converging lines of fire, and left him again with an unembarrassed line of retreat.

That mistake was minimised by the determined fashion in which the Boers held on to their position, and also by the fact, only suspected at the time, that we were attacking, not a rearguard, but the extreme left of a position of which the centre, very strongly held, was several miles to the northward. Still, with an attack accurately developed, not a hundred men would have escaped us, and every gun should have been captured.

The plea for failure at Driefontein, as at Osfontein, was tired horses. Tired they were—tired, ill-fed, and, in not a few instances, ill-ridden. But their fatigue

should have been a reason for husbanding their resources. Better lose a few by shell fire than reduce the whole to incapacity by repeated advances and retirement.

The cavalry lost its chances in the last two fights, because its exact functions, its precise duties, were not realised, and could not be achieved.

It hovered on the edge of opportunity on the look-out for an occasion, till the occasion was over, and its own capacity at an end.

Then, indeed, it was too tired; too tired for pursuit; but no pursuit should have been needed, no flight possible. The cavalry should have been standing across the road of safety half an hour before the enemy needed it.

At Driefontein the mistakes ended, perhaps because there occurred the last tactical opportunity. It was strategy that swept the Boers from Brandkop and the trenches south of Bloemfontein, and sent them scurrying through the town.

The march from Modder River to the heart of the Free State, even though accomplished by a force superior to that which opposed it, may take its place in history as a triumph of strategy over tactical mismanagement, the superiority of sound conception to executive detail.

A good many of us have made practical acquaintance on this march with the new ways of war, an acquaintance which most of the armies of Europe have still to seek.

It has been in consequence interesting to note the effect on various men of various sorts of fire.

If any general conclusion be possible, one would say that fire is feared in exact disproportion to its deadliness.

The 'pom-pom,' to quote the soldiers' name for the Vickers-Maxim one-pounder, heads the list for 'funk' as well as, up to the present, for ineffectiveness.

It fires a string of shells, each about the size and shape of a kitchen salt castor, which burst one after the other, but so villainously quick together that one cannot put a thought between them.

Each explosion is quite sufficient to leave a horse without its head, and the whole bunch of twenty-five may burst within as many yards. Hence the gun's ineffectiveness is one of the mysteries of the war: yet as a demoralising agent it has no equal.

Towards the finish of the fighting at Tiefer's Dam we had galloped up to the kraal from which a gun had been firing to get on its track.

The kraal was a space some thirty feet square enclosed by a low stone wall.

There were five of us in it and a couple of horses when the pom-pom opened, and the next instant the little place looked like the inside of a firework.

We should probably each have made a bad guess at the number of shells which burst there, but there was evidence of seven within the walls of the enclosure, and not a man was left to keep them company five seconds after the last had exploded.

Now a common shell would probably have only slightly hastened our movements, and infantry fire would have certainly drawn us up against the wall

nearest the enemy, and brought the barrels of our rifles over it. But the pom-pom cleared us out as quick as lyddite, and left us pretty flat on the further side. Yet not a man nor a horse was hit, and only a saddle damaged.

Perhaps the novelty of the weapon is responsible for its effects, and one may get used to it; but in that direction it is difficult to speak personally to much progress.

* * * * *

Every man has, in the way of fire, his own likes and dislikes.

Some men always bob to a bullet; some catch their breath at a shell; others dread the patter of a Maxim.

It is not a question of timidity nor of deadliness, but of personal antipathy.

Infantry fire is beyond all question most fatal, but many pay less heed to the whispered whistle of the bullet than to any other of the flying forms of death.

There is a bird out here, a little brown bird like a brambling, with a note that exactly mimics the Mauser, and a habit of fluting it in uncomfortable places. The Lee-Metford's note is nearly a third lower, and the Martini has the dull buzz of a laden bee.

Between the three there can be no mistaking, but the Boers have four or five other rifles harder to recognise.

The note varies, no doubt, with the rifling and initial velocity: it varies, too, with the length of flight,

The Mauser's most melodious period is from eight to eighteen hundred yards. Over that distance its note is the most exquisitely lovely of single sounds. "The silky breath of the Mauser"—no phrase has described it better. But there is something more than its beauty : something strange and baleful about it.

It goes by like the sighing of a wandering soul that can only find rest by bringing death to another. A sighing so indescribably tender and sad and sweet, that every sound of human lips seems without charm beside it.

One may be expressing a purely personal sensation, but after lying for any time under that silky breath, I have consciously to resist a desire to lift my head and take the next puff of it in my face.

So, for the first time, one realised that there might have been some fact behind the fable of the Siren, the enticement of some fatal sound which men had heard ; for here had I to stuff my ears with fear against the deadly sweetness of this Siren of the Field.

Absurd it may seem ; and yet now at night, in this sleepy city, the floating loveliness of that plaintive note comes like an echo to one's ears with an aching sense of loss ; for one knows that no less baleful lips will ever breathe its beauty, and that even the Siren herself will only whisper it when one is chaperoned by Death.

* * * * *

A flat-nosed or 'dum-dummed' Mauser probably makes a sound which one attributes to some unknown rifle, but the queerest note of all comes from a Mauser spinning the wrong way after a ricochet.

It is like the coughing of a sick ghost—indescribably curdling.

Perhaps the knowledge that at such odd moments it will let an inch of daylight through one rather adds to the effect.

The worst and best of bullet music is that one always hears it behind one. It is past before the ear can make a note of it. But that, of course, is only a consolation when the bullets are few.

On the other hand, one listens to the panting of a shell or of a bomb a quite appreciable while before the splitting bang announces its arrival somewhere.

The panting grows clearer and seems to grow quicker as the thing comes straight onward, till one can almost feel it in the air.

That, if one is sitting still and has ever known a shell to open at one's feet, is the psychological moment for which, on a battlefield, one has the least use.

Yet its announcement from a distance and the interest inspired by speculation on its fall take the mind away from a personal concern in its destination, and its explosion has always a spectacular value.

Also the damage which a shell does not do is wonderful.

At Driefontein the enemy dropped one into the leading team of the baggage train, just as the order was brought in to bear to the right. The shell dropped between the second pair of mules; and the whole ten were lifted off their legs by the explosion, and disappeared in a squealing kicking cloud of smoke.

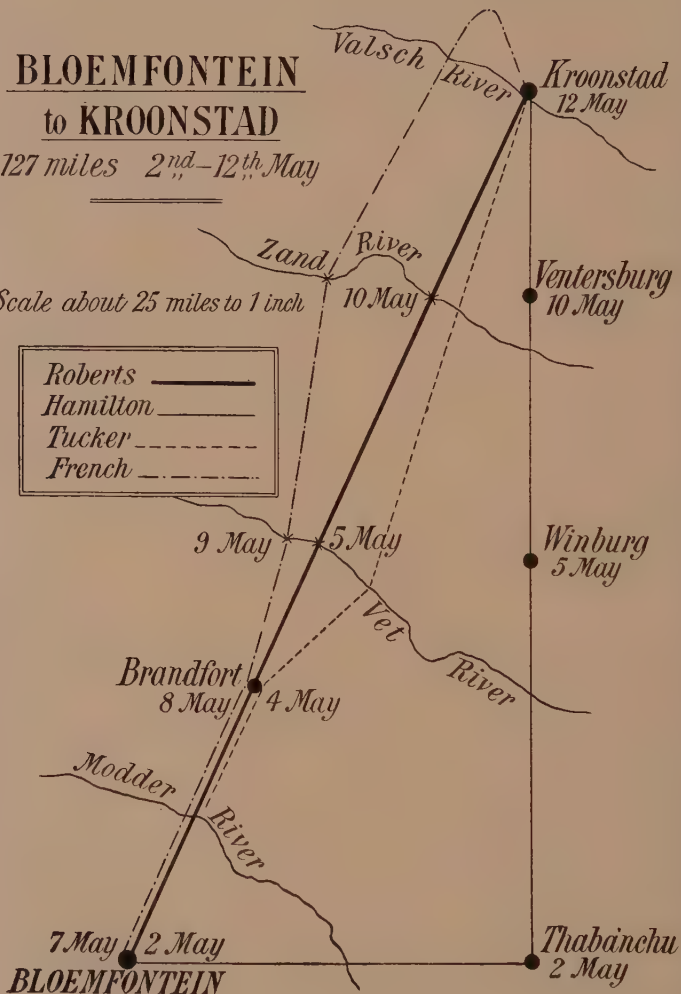
As the dust subsided, and the drivers went forward

BLOEMFONTEIN to KROONSTAD

127 miles 2nd-12th May

Scale about 25 miles to 1 inch

Roberts	————
Hamilton	————
Tucker	-----
French	-----



to cut out the pieces, the mules squirmed and staggered, to their feet and went forward with a whinny to the crack of the whip, none the worse for their tumble.

Such incidents should make one view shell fire almost with a friendly eye ; but the 15-pounder is not always a humorist.

* * * * *

We are a nation of many pretences but of no pomp, and the entry of Lord Roberts into Bloemfontein accorded well with the national temperament.

It was in many ways a most incongruous affair. True, the landdrost was led out, and handed over the keys. Seeing there are no gates to the city, but that there was a good deal of barbed wire, a pair of nippers would have been more appropriate. But, at least, the keys were traditional, and perhaps some of them opened the empty treasury chests.

After that all we met were a few men whom curiosity brought out on bicycles, a few women anxious to shake our hands, odds and ends of the city pressing to stand us a drink, and a little cheering crowd in the market place.

No one ignorant of the occasion could have guessed what had occurred. There were a few half-hidden faces, but no other sign of fear ; there were those ragged cheers, but no show of triumph ; there was the entry of the man who led the armed strength of an empire, but not a note of victory.

Here was the greatest incident in the greatest war that England has waged for half a century ; here, the capitulation of the capital of a State which had



set itself for five months to break a nation with which no Power in Europe cares much to meddle.

And thus it was celebrated! Why, the coming of a circus would have made more show!

And our occupation has been of a piece with our arrival.

Our attitude in both may be described as apologetic. We have been almost obsequiously polite, we have asked pardon for our intrusion. True, there is a profusion of Proclamations on the tin palings, but no other sign of a change of government.

Everything is as somnolent and undisturbed as though the town was still pillowed in the peace of centuries.

The streets certainly show traces of khaki, but these are mostly employed in amusing the townsfolk with such music as comes through a march—pipes and fifes and drums and bugles.

Conquerors! Well, there is a Union Jack, already blown ragged, on Government buildings.

But flags are symbols! Put against any number of them the concrete fact that one was charged five shillings for a tin of milk. Surely the amenities of war can go no further than this to victimise the victor's pockets.

"'Ang it all," said Tommy, looking back resentfully at the town where he had purchased three cigarettes for a shilling, "if yer call thet war, mike me a terbacconist when sum'mun puts the cop on Lunnon-bridge."

If with this idyllic conception of military occupation war loses half its terrors for those who do not fight, it

acquires not a few for those who do; and towns likely to fall into the hands of an enemy may, in the near future, become the desired haven of the Jew.

Of course, such trifles are soon set right under military surveillance; and now that the stores are empty, an elaborate list of prices has appeared for everything which cannot be had in the city for love or money. But it affords at least the melancholy pleasure of comparison with the prices one has paid.

After an entry so pacific, so casual almost, it would be idle to sigh for the other lost pomp of war—the pomp of faith, the pomp of thanksgiving.

Yet we do seem in such matters to treat the Providence whose aid we have invoked with a scant courtesy.

The State lends its shadow to our special intercessions for success, yet success brings no supreme avowal, no great acknowledgment.

Our professions are those of our forefathers, but the spirit of gratitude which led victorious kings to kneel before their armies in the cathedral of a conquered city seems gone from us.

Is it that we are shyer of our faith than they, or that we have lost their manners? Or is it but one more instance of the growing office of the individual which takes such matters out of public hands.

If that be so, let the individualism work equally at either end, and let it not be a nation that intercedes, and only a man that shall acknowledge.

Yet, after our drab fashion, there was significance in the worn and soiled khaki which, on the first Sunday, filled the cathedral, when the Commander-in-

Chief, as many another great and pious general, took the sacrament of remembrance and thanksgiving at this first close of his campaign.

There was, perhaps, too, something new in meaning and application sung into the Psalms of the day for the men who had fought at Paardeberg and Magersfontein : "A thousand shall fall beside thee and ten thousand at thy right hand."

War makes a reality of many metaphors ; it makes a reality, too, of some petitions ; and many, perhaps, that morning in Bloemfontein Cathedral, sad for lost friends and tired of fighting, breathed as heartily as the first lips which spoke it that promise which is half an intercession "to guide our feet into the way of peace."

CHAPTER XV

THE CENTRE OF A STATE

BLOEMFONTEIN, *March 27th.*

IN war it is the waiting which is so wearisome, and as the heart only knows its own bitterness, so only war knows its own delays.

One must have lived the moving life, with its start in the morning darkness, its solace by the red camp-fire, and the chance of fighting in between, to realise what arrestment means and the slow life of a fixed camp.

At home, no doubt, the news of progress in other quarters gives an air of motion over the whole field of war ; but here, with scarcely a word from the outer world, the sense of stagnation falls over us within a week.

How isolated we have been from the progress of events elsewhere would scarcely be credited by those who still live within reach of a daily paper.

The news of Cronje's surrender, for instance, was known in London before it had reached the ears of at least one of the brigades which had been surrounding him for a week.

Even that does not quite picture the silence in which we have been wrapped.

Of the actions which are criticised at home a few hours after they are ended the man who fought them knows next to nothing. Of the troops engaged, the form of attack, the enemy's numbers, even the fate of the day, he is alike ignorant.

He sees just the little bit of battle in front of him, knows the man's fate who falls beside him, fires blindly at the banging hill before him, creeps up and clambers over it as the banging slackens, to find nothing on the further side ; and lies down, likely enough, as darkness falls, among the stones on the top, unable to find his regiment, and without the least notion where will be its camp ; too weak from hunger and spent with fatigue to care, during the next few hours, what becomes of him.

At dawn he sees the battalions reassemble. Stiff with dew and the stones he slept on, he wanders from one to the other till he finds his own. There, with good fortune, a biscuit possibly may still be had ; the roll is called, he takes his place in the shortened company, gives a hitch to his accoutrements, and the march goes on.

That is the private soldier's view of war : a dull hungry obscure business, of which he can only appreciate the discomforts and only desire the end.

But that is a wide digression from the life of camps.

Bloemfontein is, of course, more than a camp ; it is a capital, a conquered capital, though, to tell the truth, in that capacity it makes but a poor show.

It lacks the sullen air of captivity, the scowling faces, everything that might make one feel gratefully disagreeable.

True, some of the women still flaunt their white and orange ribbons, others wear mourning for their country's fall; but with the decorative sex one never knows whether such emblems are ordered by what is personally or patriotically becoming.

And, for the rest, the city smiles and dozes and makes its profits, while the sun of conquest shines on it, and stores are scarce, and 'corners' possible. A petty-pretty little place, provincially provincial.

Just because, perhaps, it wears that appearance it is interesting as once the nest where the Free State tried to hatch its dreams of empire.

There still remain traces about the place of that astounding effort at incubation; a twisted straw, as it were, or a pressed feather, to show where the sitter brooded, though the nest and what is left of the eggs have been shifted so hastily to the north.

For it was here that the President, who was in time to be Dictator, confided his aspirations to willing and reluctant ears, and here one touches for the first time a solution of that startling piece of madness, the ultimatum of October.

Guesses have been made to account for its assurance, but none have been hazarded to explain its stupidity.

That the Transvaal meant to fight has been clear to every seeing eye in South Africa for the past three years.

That President Steyn's intriguing ambition would lead him to stand in with Mr. Kruger's fortunes was acutely suspected. That the Cape Colony might prove something less than neutral in such a contingency was gravely feared. But that this coalition of discord should hurl at Great Britain a declaration of war when the empire was in peaceful occupation of its resources no one acquainted with Dutch acuteness would have dared to prophesy. That seemed an act of frenzied rashness beyond the capacity of explanation.

There have been interpretations, it is true, but none went to the root of the obscurity.

Well, in Bloemfontein the explanation is forthcoming.

It is Dr. Leyds. The explanation, certainly, itself needs explaining, for the secret of Dr. Leyds's mysterious ascendancy over the burgher temperament has yet to be disclosed.

Postulate that, however, and a solution follows for what seemed insoluble.

Why, asked an astonished world, did not the Transvaal launch its ultimatum when Great Britain, involved or likely to be involved elsewhere, could not have replied to it effectively?

The reason is a simple one. The involution was to be a consequence of the ultimatum, and not its cause.

That declaration of war was to light the train which Dr. Leyds had strewn across Europe.

The squib should fizz in South Africa, and pouf! the Continent should be ablaze, and Great Britain burnt in the conflagration.

That was the promise, and the promise was believed.

The belief may seem incredible, but it cannot be contested. On it, and almost on it alone, were built the rebel hopes of Southern Africa.

Apart from it there was, no doubt, an inflated sense of power; a belief that, even unaided, the Republics would be able to thrust the English into the sea.

But that assurance flourished chiefly in the Dopper element; soberer minds could remember that Englishmen were no strangers to the sea, and had an ugly habit of coming uninvited out of it.

Hence there was to be peace and smooth speech until Leyds, that Manipulator of Nations, passed the word for a new policy.

Yet, in common honesty, it should be remembered that another force, stronger even than ambition, was moving the Dutch mind towards war. That was an absolute distrust of British statesmen and of Great Britain's intention.

There was scarcely a member in the governing body of either State with whom Mr. Chamberlain's reputation was worth a pinch of salt to keep it sweet. Not only did they credit him with every vice of which they were themselves the victims, but fathered on him others which they could not understand.

They made a monster from the refuse of their imaginations, and called it a Colonial Secretary. That was the man with whom they dealt.

Was it wonderful that their dealings were tor-

tuous, that they were based everywhere on a lie?

And all those on whom fell the shadow of Mr. Chamberlain's office were viewed with the same suspicion, the same blind and virulent distrust.

The High Commissioner came to be regarded not only as an enemy to the Republics, but as the foe of all humanity, a figure swollen with political leprosy, on whom no oaths were binding, and with whom it was vain to treat.

Such views may seem absurd to Englishmen, but they are realities out here: realities to the honest men of these Republics as well as to the knaves.

England, to their minds, was bent on annexation, and these were her ambassadors.

From that belief a desire for effective independence might very easily spring.

I do not say that it did. In the Transvaal there is very sufficient evidence of other origin, but in both it fostered the growth of trouble.

In the Free State, where the men of either nation lived for long on an equal footing, the era of alteration dates directly from the Jameson Raid.

That ill-timed folly made doubts that were not, and woke doubts that slept.

It did not sound, as has been stated, the hour of the Transvaal's disloyalty, but it gave that disloyalty a backing in the Free State which it had lacked before.

From that moment distrust became an accredited agent in the heart of every burgher between the

Orange and the Vaal: even English well-wishers had their doubts of what England might do.

But the Free Staters are a thrifty and hard-headed folk; it needed something more than their suspicions to make them run the risks of war.

That something was supplied by Dr. Leyds.

It is too soon to tell that envoy's story: his mission, briefly, was to convert Europe into a hand-maid for the Transvaal.

It seemed a large design, and did honour to his imagination.

Those who knew Europe better than Dr. Leyds thought that it did honour also to his self-esteem.

Be that as it may, he was able presently to report to his Government that the conversion was complete. Europe only waited the signal to tear Albion in pieces.

Perhaps the report, also, did honour to his imagination: one cannot call every man a liar who succeeds in deception—the deception may include himself.

Whether Dr. Leyds was a victim of his own credulity, or whether some elusive circumstance upset his schemes, it is impossible to say. He succeeded, at any rate, in convincing President Steyn and Paul Kruger of his success.

The effect of that conviction is remembered still by the former's friends in Bloemfontein. It altered entirely his point of view. Querulous anxiety as to Great Britain's intentions was superseded by complacent meditation on his own.

"I tell you," he had been wont to asseverate when argument failed him, "that England will attack

us on the first opportunity! I have the best information."

But, having tasted the honey of Dr. Leyds's assurance, his tone changed.

"We may have," was the altered formula, spoken with regret, "to force England to reconsider her position."

And, to the remonstrance of one who knew something of Great Britain's reconsiderations, and foretold trouble to any State that challenged them, he added with conviction :

"These things are of the past. To-day I hold England in the hollow of my hand."

That, perhaps, is the biggest grip of which any man has boasted, and it could not fail to have a dangerous effect on the system of Martinus Theunis Steyn.

What that effect was the world knows. We have been reaping what it wrought.

But it is interesting to learn that, even south of the Vaal, war was the outcome of no sudden determination, but the fruition of matured plans. Of the fashion in which those plans were developed it is difficult yet to speak with fulness.

Bribes have been openly quoted in connection with certain Free State officials, but the past history of its administration has been singularly exempt from the abuses which have made a byword of its richer neighbour.

The Transvaal sent its ally in October £500,000: but this may reasonably have been diverted into military channels, and the bulk of it already spent.

The Free State Treasury is empty, and there are claims on it still to be met, but of the gold which it has held during the last few months £30,000 seems to have been sent to Winburg and a like sum to Kroonstad.

But criticism on the financial question cannot yet be attempted. The subject is merely mentioned here because the methods and moralities of the two federated States are often treated as if as interchangeable as their armies.

They are not so by any means ; the Boer of the Free States being, in civil matters, a century ahead of his brother beyond the Vaal.

Both are, indeed, of one kin and kind, yet even in appearance now they differ ; and the difference, insufficient as the cause may seem, can only be attributed to education.

It must be remembered for ever in its favour that out of the first Budget which showed a surplus the Free State voted £200,000 for education.

A sum so large in proportion to revenue has never by any people been devoted to such a purpose, and for that reason, perhaps, the results have been likewise disproportioned to the cause.

Excellent schools are to be found in all towns of any size, and in the thinly-populated districts a system of peripatetic school has been inaugurated, the school-master moving from farm to farm, staying at each a certain period, at the farmer's expense, and teaching at each in turn the children of the neighbourhood, who have thus in alternation for some part of the year the advantage of his propinquity.

Seeing how their common fortune has linked the two States together in men's estimates, it is worth mentioning this point of difference : that the Boer of the Transvaal is almost always, and the Boer of the Free State very seldom, a boor as well.

CHAPTER XVI

“ALLES ZAL RECHT KOMEN”

BLOEMFONTEIN, *April 6th.*

IF we Englishmen were ever meant to be soldiers the meaning surely must have lapsed with time.

For to-day we seem quite unable to take war seriously for more than ten days together.

Our sporting instincts supply us with dangerous ideals on a battlefield, and our optimism and unconquerable self-confidence lead us into trouble the instant fighting is at an end.

With the odds against us and our back to the wall we take some beating, but with success all our bad qualities come out.

Take, for example, that melancholy incident with which March ended.

No criticisms on it were, very wisely, permitted by cable, but it was the sort of blunder on which no criticism is needed: the facts carried their own condemnation.

So plain indeed is their story that its details are

only worth renewed narration as part of a more serious and far-reaching dereliction.

The army occupied Bloemfontein on the 13th, after a week's marching.

The enemy were retreating in apparent disorder, certainly in great haste, and after narrowly escaping at Poplar Grove a considerable disaster.

Bloemfontein lay before us as a place of green harbourage; its sleepy alleys breathed of peace. News came of Kruger's overtures for intervention, and on all sides rose a chorus that for the Free State, certainly, the war was at an end.

Arms were being tendered, commandos dispersing, the farms refilling with men who had fought. The watchword was, 'Let well alone,' and time and clemency were to do their work.

"Alles zal recht komen." It is the motto of this as of every lotus land, but it is not readily adapted to military uses.

From the south the forces which had been confronting Clements and Gatacre were known to be trekking, pushing north with all speed possible to join the commandos concentrating on Kroonstad from every direction.

They were in number about six thousand, with a convoy of seven hundred wagons, covering over twenty miles of road. They had a march of close on two hundred miles before they could consider themselves in safety, and across the road thither stood an army of thirty thousand men, a hundred and twenty miles to the north of them. The hostile border of the Basutos was on their right flank, and

behind them an ever-increasing force far superior to their own.

Never were men in more desperate position, and those men knew it.

The Boers knew that the conquerors of Bloemfontein had but to move sixty miles to the westward to close every avenue of escape; knew that he had nowhere to look for help, since every armed man throughout the country was flying northward in disorder; knew that he could hope for nothing from his enemies' lack of food, since a march on Ladybrand or Wepener would lead them into the granary of the country; knew that though some commandos might cut their way through the cordon he expected to find about him, the entire convoy must fall into British hands, and with it the last possibility of resistance in the Free State.

But one thing he did not know, or his hopes would have risen, that the mottoes of Dutch indifference and of British optimism are one.

"Alles zal recht komen"—"It will be all right on the night."

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On the 18th, while the Boer forces were making that splendid and forlorn march from the south—which as a march must be considered superior to that of the British into Bloemfontein—unillumined by the hope of success, and over roads sodden with water, a force of observation, with pacific intentions, was sent under the command of General French to the eastward.

It consisted of two regiments of cavalry, some

Mounted Infantry, and two batteries of Horse Artillery.

With Thaba'nchu for headquarters, it was to exhibit itself reassuringly, distribute Proclamations, and secure some twenty thousand pounds' worth of flour from Leeuw River Mills.

From the first its affairs went none too well. The detached post at the mills found the enemy around it, saw two commandos moving north, and asked for reinforcement.

The little force had not many men to spare for such a purpose, but a strong patrol was sent forward half-way to the post, to cover its withdrawal if the enemy attacked it.

But the enemy seldom shoots at a rabbit when it is looking for a lion : it followed its orders, and went north into safety. The post, encouraged by this appearance of timidity, pushed on to Ladybrand, dug out the landdrost with the point of the bayonet, and then, finding that the Boers were reappearing in unlooked for numbers, fell back on Thaba'nchu by the shortest route.

The force there, left in the hands of Colonel Broadwood, had already become conscious of the enemy's presence, and at noon of the 30th started its baggage on the road to Bloemfontein, and followed it, fighting, with the enemy never more than a short shot away.

The baggage crossed the Modder and outspanned by the waterworks at six on Friday evening, the force joining it at two o'clock next morning after a clever and continuous rearguard action. It was now about

twenty-five miles from home, but much less secure than it imagined.

Just after dawn on Saturday, while the convoy was cooking its breakfast, a shell from the hills beyond the river fell into the camp. The shell had a range at which Horse Artillery can only look foolish, and there was nothing for the little force but to pack up its goods and go.

It went speedily enough, for the shells were becoming frequent; the mules were inspanned, the horses harnessed, and the wagons pushed forward with the guns beside them. It was not, by all accounts, the most orderly procession, but the disorder came of carelessness, not of fear. Meanwhile the better part of the Cavalry was thrown out as a screen to check a possible advance from the eastward, and covered the convoy's retreat.

Remember, that all the shells were coming from beyond the river, and the road home was supposed, not without good reason, to be clear.

Short of three miles further on it crosses a branch of the Modder, now little better than a muddy spruit.

The leading wagons had gone over when a sudden posse of Boers leaped out on the teams, crying to the drivers and escort to throw down their arms.

Seeing that the enemy could much more safely, and with equal profit, have shot the lot, the effort to take them alive must be considered a humane one. But it was not successful.

The men near the spruit surrendered, but a troop of Roberts's Horse, which rode up to investigate the

delay, turned and galloped back when they discovered the cause of it.

At that signal of resistance every rifle in the spruit was emptied, and bullets swept the flying horsemen from their saddles as the scythe cuts a swathe of grass.

The scene which followed was of an unspeakable confusion.

The enemy's shells from beyond the river were still stalking thunderously behind the column, when the sudden spray of bullets burst across its front, and the next instant a red smear of fire along the grey north bank of the spruit raked the long convoy with a line of lead.

The bullets splintered the spokes of the wagon wheels, and burst in jets of molten metal against the iron rims, the range being anything from ten yards onwards.

The oxen fell mute in their spans, ripped by the fire, or struggled, bellowing with their wounds; the mules squealed and stampeded, while out of the horrible tangle of living and dying, of men and beasts, the horse guns tried to smash their way.

In the mellay at the head of the column the captured escort had gripped their arms again, and, slipping under the wagons, were shooting at their captors through the wheels, while the Boers on the north side emptied their Mausers into the mingled fight of friend and foe.

It is wonderful that from such a shambles anything was extricated, but five guns out of two batteries were by heroic efforts dragged back some six hundred

yards to a cluster of tin shanties, where a roll of the ground offered slight protection.

There the broken fragments of Colonel Broadwood's force came together, under fire from three sides, and began slowly and sullenly to fight their way out by the fourth.

A reported drift across the spruit some miles to the south offered the one chance of safety, and that way they went—a dazed and disordered stream of men, but fighting, apart or together, for all they were worth.

To the Mounted Infantry belong the honours of that day's business. They lost close on a third of their numbers, some units far more than a third, but they fought with determined courage to the very finish, and without them the cavalry regiments of the brigade would have fared badly.

The rest of the story, brave though it be, does not so much concern us.

The gallant effort of Roberts's Horse to outflank the enemy; the reappearance of order and the sharp contest at the drift; the straggling struggle beyond it on the road home.

It came in here—and it has come in, such was its interest, at too great length—as an illustration of that casual British over-confidence and hatred of precaution which has let so many an advantage slip through our grasp.

At Sanna's Post,¹ in open country, it allowed us

¹ The action at Sanna's Post was as great a surprise to the Boers as to ourselves. Their plans were only laid for the capture of the small force holding the waterworks, and when

to fall into a trap which an adherence to the most elementary of military axioms would have detected.

And this is but a sample in little of what our larger operations can show. It is near on a month since we entered Bloemfontein, and our position in the Free State, save so far as it has been altered by reinforcements, is not by that month the better, but by that month the worse.

A beaten enemy has been altered to one that threatens us on all sides ; his flying commandos have turned on us, he is taking vengeance as he pleases on those of his burghers who have submitted to our show of power ; he has robbed us with little loss to himself of fifteen hundred men.

A Correspondent is in no position to criticise, on the spot and at the moment, the strategy and policies of a Commander-in-Chief, but the refrain, for all that, rings ironically in one's ears, "Alles zal recht komen."

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From Boshof comes news of a successful foray, in which General de Villebois Mareuil was killed.

The account of that fight will doubtless be told from Kimberley, since thence came the force which was engaged.

One sorrowful reference to it may be permitted

they discovered that they had unwittingly set a trap for the whole of Colonel Broadwood's brigade, they were none too sure of their success, since they were only holding the spruit with four hundred men. The affair on their part was brilliantly conceived, and carried through by a fine piece of marching.

here—indeed, little more would be possible, for at present we only know that success has cost us the life of Captain Cecil Boyle.

How he fell has not yet been told, but we who knew him have no need to ask, for there was but one way and that the most honourable, in which Cecil Boyle could find death on the field.

He is but one of many who have left their lives in Africa, and yet he is something more. He stood for that enthusiasm of service which drove English gentlemen from their pleasure and their business out here to help us. He was the first of the English Yeomanry to arrive in Africa : he is, alas ! the first to leave it.

And he came, not, as so many of us, with a personal motive ; neither from *ennui* nor for glory, but from pure love of his land.

For him it was England only, and still England : the steadfastness of her valour, the strength of her purpose, the clearness of her fame.

His ardour made us all seem idlers, and his seriousness put our levity to shame.

And now he is gone, with the fight unfinished and the day half done.

Gone ! and yet, for those who have felt his warm faith, his humble ardour, his utter indifference to the worst of Fate, here still. For it is character which is immortal, which outlives the long hour of men's ineptitude and the brief splendour of their fame ; here still for every heart whose pulses his had quickened, and for every eye whose outlook his had cleared : here, more than as a memory, more than as

a grief, in the impelling ardour of his loyal self-sacrifice.

And so, for him, perhaps, the words which have stood for our infirmities may come to have an altered meaning: "Alles zal recht komen"—"Right shall come out of all."

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAY OF TREADING DOWN

"This city is the caldron and we be the flesh."

BLOEMFONTEIN, *Easter Week.*

FOR three days rain has been falling in thunderous spouts from clouds that swelled in blue-black masses from each corner of the sky, and burst above us with blinding flashes.

There have been breaks of sapphire sky in the day-time, and white watery spaces of the moon at night, but, for the most part, a noisy welter of water and the rending roar of thunder from morning to morning.

And now, with everything soaked to a pulpy wetness, and the wide approaches to the city churned into a froth of mud, the rain has settled to a cold dreary gray persistence, which seems as if it would never cease.

Across the road, before the Doric columns of the Raadzaal, stands a long line of covered wagons, filling the street. They have hoods that once were white, with a dull red cross on them, and above each a dragged wisp of bunting clings about a pole.

They move slowly—not at a snail's pace even—

each waiting at that gate in the gilded railings for its load. And out of that great house of speech, which is now a house of pain, come the pallid weak-kneed men, with lean bodies and gray faces and ragged beards; some still in their thin cotten khaki, tottering along, or leaning on stronger shoulders, or carried on stretchers, across the soaking courtyard in the cold unceasing rain.

The wet darkens the soiled stuff they wear, standing there in the mud until their names are called, and they are lifted or pushed up into the wagons.

As each is filled the whips crack, the mules strain and slither, and the line moves up another space through the blur of rain, and waits again, till the last ambulance is loaded.

That is the other story of war: the story not of battle, of daring, and the red honour of wounds, but of sickening impotence and of insidious disease.

We have every chance to ponder on it here in Bloemfontein. Two thousand five hundred of the force are now in hospital: there are ten deaths a day.

London would not look cheerful under that sort of sickness, with a weekly death-rate of about twelve thousand; and typhoid is, perhaps, the least cheerful of epidemics; so dragging, so intractable, and with its lurking menace in every cup of milk and glass of water for those that remain.

For no man here could put his finger on any certain source of the enteric; or, rather, could put his finger certainly on nothing which might not be the source of it.

We drank, of course, along the march, water that was not fit for dogs, and water, as at Paardeberg, which the dogs refused.

Doubtless from that polluted reach of the Modder, which dead horses lined, and down which dead men floated, came the first malignance of the disease.

It had been eating the inwards out of many a man who, so long as a fight was to be faced or a march to be made, kept his place in the ranks, and staggered triumphant into Bloemfontein, with no life but that of the fever in his starved body.

In our remembrance of brave things, the fashion in which the boys of the Essex, the Buffs, and the Welsh cleared the ridge at Driefontein will outlast other memories of this short campaign ; but the hand of a more competent Remembrancer may inscribe above that the silent fortitude with which those others, all aflame with fever, carried their kits and clung to their rifles along the last interminable miles of the way.

Poor lads, they were burnt by that fire as moths are shrivelled in a flame ; burnt so fast that, when they fell, not an effort could be made to save them.

For the brave heart was rigid only a few hours after it had owned to its defeat.

So the death that lay hid in the Modder came to Bloemfontein, as, true to its hour, it claimed the prisoner who had carried it to the Cape.

Winner and loser paid alike for that week of stubborn endurance at Paardeberg, for Nature has no two prices, and death came with the same punctual indifference to the conqueror and the conquered.

Perhaps his coming was more cruel to the captive

but in Bloemfontein it dulled the note of victory and gave us a foretaste of what remained in store.

Rain followed our arrival, and the men, lying out under the little dark blanket shelters on the veld, huddled closer together on the soppy grass or rose and outpaced the night, beating the wet from their numbed limbs.

They had borne as bad by the way, but in warmer weather, and on bodies less wasted by shrunken rations and still pulsing with expectation.

The tension past, and rest possible, they sickened like cattle with the pest.

The field hospitals were swamped at once with the sudden influx, and every home and hospital in the town was strained to hold it.

The Raadzaal was taken, swept clear of its seats, the floor of its great hall hidden with beds and stretchers, operating-rooms and dispensaries arranged in its chambers of committee, and the red cross run up beneath the Jack above its dome.

Now limp figures in lazuli blue sit and sun themselves along its colonnades; and in the hall, where Senators squabbled, men, who knew not of their quarrels, turn their faces to the wall and die.

So, even in the careless callous life of a campaign sadness settles down on a camp.

Every morning little parties come from the tents beyond the town with spade and pick on their shoulders. And every afternoon, behind its guard with arms reversed, follows the jolting buck wagon with its long gaunt team of mules; and on the wagon, twisted in a blanket, the forsaken body.

Sometimes there is a flag to hide for the last time with its gay colour the men who fought for it ; but there seem to be fewer flags than those who go to burial, for the dingy blanket serves for most.

And always there is silence. The slow beat of marching feet, the creaking of the wheels, the jingle of harness. That is all. No music. The city's nerves, perhaps, would hardly stand the march from 'Saul' through all the afternoons.

So the dead go through the city to their camp, like any other burden which the lean mules bear.

Only the tilted butt and the lifted sling before it proclaim that close-stitched bale as merchandise which man no more may handle, which has done its work and fetched its price in the traffic of the world.

* * * * *

So it is that camps grow sad, and yet not with death. For camps are won by death, and won gladly.

When the last shot is fired as evening falls, and the tired fighters, still but half sure how they stand, hear the clear call that tells of victory, and see in the transparent dusk beneath them the orange fires kindle round the new-made camp, it is not of death that they think : though the dead lie in the dark about them ; though their feet may tread on dead men's fingers, and their steps stumble over a dead man's face ; not of the unknown dead who have fallen in front of them, nor of the dead, near and dear, who have dropped at their side ; for the thing un hoped has happened, the miracle is performed, and death,

for that one moment in the world, is swallowed up in victory.

So it is always thankfully that camps are pitched. There is the clean sweetness of new grass, the clearness of untroubled water, an air untainted with decay.

The trodden turf, the muddy dam, the heaps of refuse, the litter of tins, the foul whirr of flies where beasts have been slaughtered, the bitter odour from dead horse and mule—all these are behind; and for a day, at least, there may be the fragrance of an earth still unpolluted, the sweet pretence of peace.

Curiously enough, not only to sentimental Correspondents does such pretence appeal. It is the hardest and roughest of men who make the most of any little bits of prettiness that have outlived for an hour the filth of war. It is they who keep queer little pets and who tend quaint little flowers, about which hangs, no doubt, some constraining memory.

Riding into Osfontein were a bearded scout and a Lancer, the Lancer with a face still pink from home. The scout touched the other's arm and pointed to a field mouse on the veld in front of them washing his face in his paws. The youngster dug in his spurs, lowered his lance, and lifted the living quivering little beast impaled like a tent-peg on the point of it. He waved it, laughing, as he reined round his horse, but was met by a mouth of such damnation as took the colour out of his cheeks.

At his sulky expostulation the elder man suddenly checked his tongue; adding, when they had ridden on together, half ashamedly and with eyes averted, "I've seen enough o' dead things."

One would have gathered more certainly from the hard-bitten face that dead things, rather, had seen enough of him. But incongruities of the kind are common ; only they are shy and seldom seen. And they come, so many of them, from a desire for that same pretence of peace, a make-believe of homeliness and of home.

Perhaps that make-believe was hardest here on Easter Day. Although it moves with the moon, Easter always seems, at home, like the gate of spring, a gate of sunlight and green buds.

Beyond it the nests are building and the leaves unfold ; birds are calling across the daffodils to the blue carpeted wood with its moist primroses, and life goes by with a sound of bells and a skirt of azure and gold and green.

It is probably snowing in England as one writes, but that is how an exile sees it.

Here it did not snow, but it rained dismally. And the days grow cold and short and dark, and the season is dying. How can one think of Easter when the gate is of bare boughs and winter shivers beyond it ; and when, for your white lilies of Festival, we wear—chrysanthemums ?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOST OPPORTUNITY

BLOEMFONTEIN, *April 28th.*

AFTER this long impatient delay in Bloemfontein, to be moving again was most agreeable, even though the movement did not quite accord with what one wished.

One's wishes in such a matter are, of course, a good deal qualified by one's ignorance ; there being too many unknowns in the equation to permit a definite working out.

There are horses ; cavalry horses, beside which the grass of the veld is a long-lived affair.

There is transport ; which no man can number, but which any man, apparently, can renumber.

And there is supply ; which arrives at Bloemfontein when needed at Edenburg, and stays at Edenburg when Bloemfontein is starving.

These three ! and ignorance of the least of them would make a strategist tear his hair.

So we sit in a grumbling silence ; suppose our postulates, and make our plans, which are not those which are worked out elsewhere.

For the trouble is this. If in a bag you have a very lively creature, say a cat, and wish to keep it there, you do not pinch the bottom of the bag, because so you may pinch the cat and make it jump ; but you pinch the top of the bag together, and then do to the cat what you will. Well, the south-eastern corner of the Orange State is a strategical bag, with the railway and the Caledon River for its two side seams, and the Orange River to close the bottom.

The string which shuts the top of the bag is the red road that runs from Bloemfontein through Thaba'nchu and Ladybrand to the Caledon before Maseru ; or, if a shorter string were wanted, from Bloemfontein through Dewetsdorp to the Caledon above Wepener. Now, this bag was very full of cat, of Boer cat, when we arrived in the capital ; and, as has been regretfully pointed out already, the cat might have been caught. For in those days the cat was fat with transport and slow of movement, and in great fear of being bagged.

But we were told then that the animal had any way but a few weeks to live, that it was already in a decline, and soon there would be nothing left of it but the skin to spread on our carpet.

And we unluckily believed the saying, and the cat escaped.

And having learnt how little bags meant to us, and having renewed its vigour and spent its fatness, the cat came back into the bag again.

This time, having amended our views on feline longevity, we thought that the cat was worth catching, but our procedure unfortunately was not

that adopted with cats on a smaller scale. We began by pinching the bottom of the bag, and only when the cat's head was near the top of it did we make a grab at the strings.

That, at least, is how the thing looks to people in no position to form an opinion.

The pressure began at the left lower corner of the bag, from Bethulie and Springfontein towards Smithfield and Wepener. It was continued from Edenburg, through Reddersburg, towards Dewetsdorp.

The cat was rising in the bag, lifting its feet out of the bottom corners. Then on Sunday the Guards moved from Ferreira, and the 18th Brigade from Springfield, at the neck of the bag, past Leeuwkop on Dewetsdorp, and two brigades of cavalry to a point on the Modder some twenty miles north of it. On Monday and Tuesday the Ninth Division and Mounted Infantry tightened the top string of the bag as far as Thaba'nchu.

And so, first the cat's toe was pinched, and then its knee, and then its waist, and then its shoulders, and if the plan were to empty the bag the plan was admirable, but if it were to catch the cat—well, the plan might have been improved.

We ignorant speculators in Bloemfontein wanted the cat caught, wanted to hear its bones scrunch in the bag, and have done with that animal for the rest of time.

Perhaps, and it is a very adventurous possibility, no harm but hurry was intended to the cat.

Perhaps, to be generous in alternatives, there were difficulties in detail about the larger plan of

which an independent observer could not be cognisant

There is an inherent likelihood of a Commander-in-Chief having weighed the advantages of a plan, the possibilities of which appeal to every man with a rifle. But there is a possibility also that a mind, cumbered with far-reaching plans and multitudinous complexities, may miss what is obvious to the man who has nothing else to ponder.

Any way, to leave our simile of the cat, the operations in Wepener, Bloemfontein, and Moroka, which are almost ended, have the appearance of a drive in which the beaters were started long before the guns were placed. We have had a shot at some of the slow birds (the great news even has come in this morning that one Boer has been captured), but it is only too probable that the best of the lot will clear from the end of covert well out of range.

Sunday's fight was in no way remarkable. Our road to Leeuwberg ran south-east; the 18th Brigade lying seven miles east, the Guards about the same distance south of Bloemfontein.

They were to converge on the Dewetsdorp road, forming, for the first time, on the field, the Eleventh Division, and to be preceded by the newly-constituted 2nd Mounted Infantry Brigade.

Constitutions change so often and so rapidly out here that really for a major portion of the time we do not know where we are; and to send home details of the changes would but add to your confusion, since the post and the cable are further apart in time than are our spasms of reconstruction.

The guns of the Eleventh Division, which were to complete its corporate existence, had orders to proceed, one battery by Springfield, and two, with two naval 12-pounders, along the direct route.

Unfortunately they all went the long way, and the Guards waited for two hours in a mist of strong language, where their road from the southward crossed that from the town, for their share of the artillery.

Then General Pole-Carew, knowing that his scouts were in touch with the enemy, and that the chance of completing an action by daylight at Leeuwberg was becoming every moment more remote, ordered the brigade to advance.

At one o'clock, with the rough ridge of the mountain right in front of us, we came in touch with the 18th Brigadë, waiting, despairing, for us two miles on the left.

It had a battery, and began, on our signal, to shell a deep cleft that ran between the brigades towards the enemy, the contents of which we could not see.

Our centre was a little rocky tree-tufted kopje, with a dam behind it, round which the convoy gathered. In front, a rolling grassy plain, scarred on the left with dongas, rose in green folds to the purple face of the hill.

The berg's bluntness dropped on the left to a row of small brown kopjes, half a mile beneath and in front of which was a long dark fringe of poplars, hiding a farm.

Towards this farm, after its brief bombardment, the 18th Brigade advanced, the Guards opening out at the same time to encircle the berg on the

right, the Mounted Infantry lying in a mass on the down beyond them.

The first notice of the Boers' presence came from the snap of a shell and a gray puff of smoke high on the right ; another and another followed, all so badly fused that one conjectured the gun to be, probably, well up on the hill.

The Mounted Infantry fell back, and the long thin brown threads of men lengthened out over the downs, like a moving entanglement about the mountain. North and south they extended, line beyond line of dust-coloured dots in the grass, that scarcely seemed to be in motion, yet drew ever nearer to the unknown fate that hid behind the hill.

Then, unexpectedly, our guns opened on the left, and from behind the fringe of poplars the Boers burst like bees, and cantered up behind the brown kopjes ; the shells, beautifully placed, chasing the tail of them till the last was hidden.

As they fled, in the necks of those brown hills other Boers appeared, probably reinforcements.

They rode up suddenly, halted against the olive evening sky, man and horse looking incredibly large, and vanished.

Above the creeping lines of khaki, those giant horsemen had an almost operatic air. One expected to hear them rattle their spears and shout the battle-cry of the Valkyries.

By this time the diaphanous brown wings of the division were so wide apart that one had to throw in one's lot with one or other.

The left looked the likelier, and proved so ; for,

scarcely had its right reached the poplars, when the horrible stammer of the 'pom-pom' sounded from the kopjes and its shells began to sweep through the lines of the Welsh.

Never before had the Boers treated us to such a string of fire, and for some moments the little snapping whistling cases were going off about one like crackers in a bomb.

But fate seems against that kind of gun, for the damage was, as usual, slight ; but the shells laid the firing line very speedily and properly on its face, and progress began to be slow.

The farm was barely occupied, the kopjes still uncarried, as darkness began to fall, and French's two brigades of cavalry, which had appeared on the extreme left some two hours previously, had done nothing to justify their appearance.

Clearly the fight that day could come to no definite finish, and so one turned about regretfully for home.

An eighteen miles' canter in the dark across a country webbed with barbed-wire fences has its infelicities, even on the most splendid of starlit nights ; and the discovery that one's news was so far ahead of official intelligence that it might have to be restrained for twenty-four hours did not encourage retrospective enjoyment at the finish.

But the use of the telegraph by correspondents needs reconsideration, and one would not be sorry to see its advantages forbidden them in future wars. The subject, however, requires separate discussion.

Sunday's fight had one interesting feature. It was an attack on a position made by two brigades and a

kopje. The kopje's part in the action was considerable. It concealed an imaginary centre. All it really hid was the supply train, and that imperfectly. Yet, with a company sprinkled among its rocks and bushes, and the dark mass of wagons and beasts beyond, it made from a distance no inconsiderable show.

Indubitably bluff has as big a part to play in war as at poker, and considering the Boers' affection for cover, their ignorance of the counter attack, and disrelish for any tactics not purely statical, General Pole-Carew was fully justified in playing from a stronger hand than he had.

His handling of two brigades as if they were three was an excellent piece of work, competent and decided. And he was fettered by ill fortune : in having to delay his attack for lack of guns, in having to fight the major portion of it without them, and in having on the following day the direction of affairs taken out of his hands.

Yet it would be fatal to evolve a practice or to draw conclusions from this style of fighting. What we learnt before we are unlearning now, and what we are learning here we must unlearn again.

The Boers cannot afford to waste a man ; but the chances which they miss will be taken by any nation with fighting material to spare.

Boer warfare is a very specialised affair, and many of its strongest features are the qualities of its defects.

We are a stiff-necked people, and adapt ourselves slowly to new conditions, even when they are conditions of our own salvation : but we grow stiff in our

adaptations also, and it is possible we may learn too much from the Boers.

One point which the fight of Sunday instanced was the convenience of the division, when used as a unit, being composed of three brigades.

Thus constituted, each brigade can be handled independently, and yet add cohesion to the entire command.

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Monday brought the prospect of another fight within reach of headquarters. An attempt was to be made to retake the waterworks, and three regiments of the 19th Brigade, under General Smith-Dorrien, followed the 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade from Springfield towards Sanna's Post.

The force struck one as altogether insufficient to do the business, and so it probably would have proved had the Boers held on to their positions.

The twenty-one miles to Klip Kraal brought us in the afternoon to the scene of that soldier's fight on the last morning of March, when the stain of careless leading was blotted out by the splendid valour of the unled.

There remained traces of it still—the shattered skeletons of wagons, the whitening bones of beasts. They lay there in the silence of that silent sandy place; and dark in the spruit glimmered the oily green water which had been dyed with blood.

The scene was still with that depth of stillness which death leaves behind it, and still, too, with the lurking sense of danger.

The tin houses were deserted, where the guns had

stood at bay, and, with lead falling from three sides on them, swept the spruit with shrapnel till the flying surge of men and horses could be sworn into shape.

Beyond, the tall chimney of the waterworks rose bare above the sandy roll of ground ; its hidden houses adding to the feeling of impending mischief.

But the scouts rode unchallenged over the low flat ridge to the Modder's banks beyond it, and found the works still undestroyed. Bullets had cut stars in the windows, splintered holes in the doors, and battered the boilers beyond them ; but that was accidental damage.

The wilful was confined to the removal of the eccentric slides from the main and pumping engines ; but, as these could be coupled, only the main needed repairing for work to be resumed. The Boers were altogether too cute to destroy a business in which they had a pecuniary interest.

Riding back to the tin houses a few shells were dropped about us from beyond the river, and this little ebullition succeeded, curiously enough, in convincing General Ian Hamilton that our advance would be resisted on the morrow.

It may, generally, be taken for granted, however, that when the Boer fires unprovoked at long range he does not mean to fight from where he fires.

He did not on Tuesday. We quartered the ground with our three poor battalions, pattered at him with our two little guns, and drove in his flanks with some fifteen hundred mounted men, who did their work right well.

But the Boer scarcely deigned to stay to shoot us,

and by noon we held his hills, and the waterworks were ours.

So ended the prelude to the advance, which, despite frequent disappointments, it seems not altogether vain to expect next week.

What shape that advance will take is a very well-kept secret. It is a secret kept the more readily since it seems subject considerably to alteration.

What appears probable is a central column of three infantry divisions, for choice the Seventh, Ninth, and Eleventh, moving north along the railway, covered by a screen of cavalry and the mounted infantry brigades.

A division, possibly the Eighth, may be left at Thaba'nchu and Ladybrand to patrol the grain districts as far as Winburg and Senekal, protect the right flank, and finally open the Natal passes. Another division, say the Sixth, will garrison Bloemfontein, and the troops, particularly the Yeomanry now arriving from the Cape, will patrol the conquered districts and protect the railway.

Yet these are but guesses, and such guesses are an unprovoked temerity.

CHAPTER XIX

PROCLAMATIONS

BLOEMFONTEIN, *May 1st.*

ONE condition of a campaign to which one's consciousness seldom extends, and even more rarely one's gratitude, is the unadulterated company of men.

One has the harbourage, the exclusions of a monastery without its spiritual dependence: we are fenced, but free. Fenced from womankind by death and the wilderness, free of our own thoughts and oaths and dreams.

There is for the misogynist, as for the lover, the same convenient detachment, the same latitude in which to curse or to worship, unhampered by realities.

In four months we have not spoken to a woman, and though one should not perhaps call that of itself a liberal education, it does draw out in a fashion much that is latent in a man.

It draws out much that one never knew was in him; it kills off much that one thought was really him.

His pretences, his unequal moods, his jealous distrust, his easy duplicities, his air of conquest, all these, for which we hated him, drop away. We supposed them to be the man, whereas they turn out—war turns them out—to have been the woman.

She is, as it were, the temperature which forces them, the encouraging hothouse over his head, tempting out of him sappy growths he was never meant to bear. And when she is gone, and he is stuck down under the open sky, with the celibate wind about him, the growths wither and slough off, and he becomes again hardy and simple and fit for comradeship.

Whether that is in dispraise of him or of her is hard to say, and matters nothing here. Whether he must inevitably pay such a price for her company, must acquire, without the grace with which she wears them, her little perfidies, must lose in fraternity what he gains in love?

What one learns from war is that it is she who has so changed him, and that, in her absence, he comes again into his own.

But war reveals something else, which, put beside the other, is just as curious.

Not only does he become more of a man as he recedes from her, but he becomes more of a woman also: he loses the horrid little tricks he has caught from her, he developes the fineness and sympathy which should be her special merit.

All the qualities which he has, so to say, made over to her as womanly—tenderness, forethought, patient endurance, unselfish sacrifice—he takes again upon

himself when the woman is away. One is tempted, from the admirable fashion in which man thus 'doubles' the sexes, to suspect that the duality of human nature is artificial, and to reflect that Eve, as we have been told, was rather, for her husband, in the way of subtraction than addition.

Adam, probably, with a rib away, saw no reason why he should continue to sustain all the virtues, and handed over those for which he had least use to Eve ; and so our later Adam, when that rib, which has turned out so well, is lost to him for any length of time, does really, in re-developing in himself the virtues which he lent to it, only revert to his earliest condition.

These things may seem to those who have had no opportunity to observe them scarcely worth speculation at such length, but the changes which this sexual detachment effects in man are worth far more extended study, and can be studied only on a campaign.

Much else helps doubtless towards the unlooked-for end.

The common level of simplicity, the constant fraternal opportunities for assistance, the sobering fineness in the brooding eyes of death—all these enlarge the scope and sweeten the fibre of men's souls, but their part in the change is a small one by comparison with that which isolation can effect.

Bloemfontein has taught us that ; for, ringed as it still is by war, it has been touched already with a faint fragrance of the feminine world from the skirts of its camp-followers.

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The last week has marked in our methods a

pronounced change. Complete ignorance of the possibilities in war waged by kindness prevented any criticism of Lord Roberts's first Proclamation.

One was only too willing to cherish the belief that in war one hand might affect ignorance of what the other was doing, that the right might be using the rifle and the left the Golden Rule.

There was an air of contradiction in the prospect, but contradictions are of classic growth about the turning of the smitten cheek, and this last one seemed no more incomprehensible than the others.

But it can hardly be considered a success. Its absurdities were too flagrant.

Where is war to go if you pay the invaded for the use of their country and pay them high?

Invasion was formerly considered the basis of success, but under our latest regulations it would come too expensive.

When every damage has to be made good, and foodstuffs purchased at five times their value, an army would prefer to fight on its own soil.

Imagine a bill for £5,000 being presented by the Ranger of Richmond Park for alleged injury to its fences by an invading army! Yet we have dealt with an almost exact equivalent within a few miles of Bloemfontein; and allowed two-thirds of the sum claimed.

It is very pretty, very ingenuous; but is it, after all, pacific, and is it war?

There is a point where the atoning process of modern charity must cease, or lapse into an ineffective absurdity.

The kindest stroke in war is that which concludes it, and every effort after amelioration which prolongs it is a needless cruelty.

We have, in our national fashion, shown a larger consideration for the people we were fighting than for the men by whom we fought. Our clemency was an altruistic experiment, but the altruism of such clemency is vicarious ; to the credit of the commander, to the cost of the men—a very doubtful virtue.

It is horrible, certainly, to burn homesteads and to turn women houseless into the night. But war is that kind of thing, visiting the follies of the defenders upon the defenceless, and without that visitation resistance is but confirmed.

The Free Stater found war a very pretty business.

He had a little shooting very much at his opponents' expense. His farm, where he kept his spare Mauser and ammunition, was guarded by a British sentry, who looked after the safety of his women-folk, and saw to it that their exorbitant charges were enforced. When the weather was bad or he wanted a holiday, the farmer came home, handed in an old Snider with an oath of allegiance, and smiled at the world from behind the sentry, whom a little later he would probably shoot.

Meanwhile he made up his little bill with such losses as appealed to his humour—barbed wire consumed by British mules, bonnets and silk dresses which had appealed to the love of display in Thomas Atkins, and bedsteads and grand pianos the spoils of the cavalry.

His holiday over, the bill presented and frowned

down a few pounds, and the troops withdrawn, the farmer returned to his commando and the game went on. It was a poor one really for both sides, and so we seem at last to have discovered.

The secondary effects of war are the most mischievous. The stagnation of industry, the deflection of trade, the alteration of habit.

Like a lawsuit it may prove more expensive to win than to lose ; and were the Transvaal able by repeated retirements, and conversion of the contest into guerilla warfare, to make good their opposition till more important issues claimed our army, the Republic would emerge absolutely ruined by its success.

From no standpoint can clemency in war be considered a kindness, for were our methods in the Orange State to obtain a following in the future, and war's horrors to become less incontestable, it might be undertaken with not even the measure of seriousness which is brought to-day to its inception.

It is the women of a country which make or prevent its wars.

At the back of empire building is the desire of luxury for which most wars are undertaken, and death or wounds to the soldier count but little beside the ruin to which his home may be exposed. Now if the women of his invaded land have not only nothing to fear, but a good deal to gain from the invader, wars of protest or of despair will become of common occurrence.

There would be little to restrain States such as

we are fighting to-day from dangerous bluster if they can treat their property and families as unconsidered counters in the game of war.

This argument, which might easily be read as an apology for indiscriminate pillage, may sound atrocious in Mayfair ; but it is an atrocity only to the sentimental.

No judgments pronounced under a roof are of much use in war.

Come out here and lie under the sky ; be wet with the dews of the black morning, and parched by the relentless noon ; scrape the earth for firing, and wring drink from the shrunken dam ; share the keen quest after food, the ceaseless solicitude to provide to-morrow's meal for man and beast ; and then conduct a search for your sentimental opinions !

The struggle for life has very practical mental issues, and, when days are counted by the graves of friends, one has small sympathy with refinements which may extend the calendar.

The fires lit by Pole-Carew will do more to shorten the war than would a second Paardeberg, and, though we are bound to the terms of our first Proclamation, it is to be hoped its limitation will not be extended, and that, in future, receipts will take the place of payment.

The difficulties and rewards of justice were illustrated by the first house we burnt.

The enemy, bowered in white flags, had fired from it on the Canadian Mounted Rifles, and the house was in consequence marked for destruction.

Previous to this decision the owners had been

invited to yield any arms and ammunition they possessed, and had protested, with many appeals to Heaven, that they were people of peace, and had never had to do with instruments of destruction. Yet, when the house was burning, one fierce explosion after another bore witness to the national obliquity of statement and to the usual store of cartridges beneath the floor.

In another instance we lit on a farmhouse full of wounded Boers. The women of the house professed absolute ignorance of their guests, who had been left there, they asserted, by the enemy when passing in retreat. Returning by the same house a few days' later we arranged to take the wounded men back to Bloemfontein.

The women, learning our intention, fell on the sick men with tears, caresses, and endearing names, and so disclosed the family story.

What can one do with such a nation but rob them of every means of harmfulness?

Of guns, naturally, but guns may be hidden; therefore, of horses which cannot, of carts, of fodder, and even, if need be, of corn.

Personally, one may not approve of burning houses. Empty ones are better. Houses form an asset of the country which may be rebuilt but cannot be replaced. For in the fire is burned not man's handiwork alone but time's.

But even much less than burning is sad work enough; and he must be callous indeed who is not moved to pity by the women, sitting pale and heavy-eyed on the stoep, as the wave of war brings, in its

ebb and flow, first their kin past them and then those that would kill them.

They behave, in circumstances forlorn and difficult, extremely well. They have manners unexpectedly serene ; show often the greatest kindness to our wounded ; are seldom soured by their ill-fortune.

One carries for some while the memory of those apprehensive glances, the unsteady mouths.

For on that side of war there are no compensations. Valour and glory bring no light to soften what is lost to love.

CHAPTER XX

IN DIENST

WELGELEGEN, *May 7th.*

THE war has brought us proof on two points of interest.

It has shown the empire to be of one piece, it has attested the unchanged mettle of our men.

Nothing out here is so unfadingly impressive as the sense of having at arm's length about one the four quarters of the world.

Faces burned by the snows of the north, browned by suns of the Equator, beaten by Pacific seas. Voices rough and deep and strange, that seem to wield a new sort of English; voices that have been toned, in waste places, by the sighing of pines, the batter of winds, the surge of never-resting waters.

After that, the unfailing cheerfulness, the unflinching pluck of the common soldier.

There is really after all, when you come to think of it, so much cause why he should not be merry, so little reason why he should be brave.

His food is an accident of the evening, a chance

of the darkness ; his life is but an incident in to-morrow's battle.

He knows nothing of the cup which raises our more favoured spirits, nor of the shame and pride that shape our ends.

Yet there he is, singing to-day, dying to-morrow, and with no appreciation of the effect.

These have been the essential revelations of the campaign — our homogeneity of empire, and the worth of the men who have been often far from worthily handled.

But there has been another. One of the best of those who have left what was mortal of them in this wilderness used gravely to debate a point of our deterioration which he found difficult to define.

To disprove it in his own case he left pursuits which had no kinship with soldiering, and luxury very different from its privations, and met death in the first fight to which he led his men.

Yet sacrifice, nor self-surrender, nor valour itself were disproof enough, for the doubts he harboured had arisen from no fears for these ; and only now can one guess whence they came, and that the deterioration which he detected was in the spirit of enterprise.

It was that which made us a people. The joy in a job to do ; the ardour of overcoming for overcoming's sake ; the hunger for adventure.

And it is this spirit of enterprise which appears, in those levels of the race where once it was brightest, to have burned out.

That may seem a strange thing to say while Great

Britain is making an army from men who knew nothing of arms, while trade is exchanging its rule for a rifle, and labour beating its pruning-hook into a sword. But these things are evidence of quite other virtues: of pride of name and pride of country, of a fancy for distraction and the desire for fame, of hot courage and excited fears.

One has not to live beside these for many months, in this land of hard living, to see the great glad spirit of enterprise which seemed to clothe them drop withering away like autumn leaves, only the thin dry boughs of their brief impulses remaining.

There are very few such men out here who have repented of their pluck; very few who would hear of turning back until the 'show' is finished; but there are fewer still who are not heartily sick of the whole concern, who do not reckon daily with a sigh what they are missing in England—the racing, and the yachting, and the cricket; the little meetings and the little matches; and the shooting, it may be, to follow. The big thing they are in does not appeal to them; the taking of two countries, each of which might make a kingdom; the drawing of our scarlet line of empire round this rich corner of the world.

Mind! they mean going through with it; they would meet anything short of unconditional surrender with voluble disgust; they would stop not a step this side Pretoria.

But they hate it. Their heart is not in enterprise, but in the little ways and plays of settled conditions.

They would, had it been in their decision, have 'left the cursed place to the Dutchmen.'

Since it was not, they starve and fight and die with the best grace and most excellent courage possible.

But the change is there, from the spirit of the men who won the Indies and made America, and set our flag above the seas.

This is not to speak the sentiments of Mr. Atkins.

His, in such matters, have never counted for much, and his real feelings are always complicated by the desire to be where he is not. Also, he may tire of South Africa as quickly as of Mary Ann, but propinquity will persuade him to put up cheerfully with either.

So, because he is here he wants to be at home ; but again because he is here he makes the best of it.

He will do, here or there, all that is asked of him : everything that has ever been a soldier's glory ; but if the empire is to be abiding he must have men to lead him in whom the love-flame of adventure is still alight ; not men, however daring, however able, who count the hours that keep them still from home.

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The veld is a queer country, and only those who have ridden across the sameness of its unchanging miles can claim to know much about it.

Sometimes it seems designed as a ground to the colour and splendour of its April storms. Nothing but the sameness of its empty spaces would serve the

wild magnificence of thunderous skies which close the rainy season.

One cannot paint them from any palette known to English heavens : the strange clarity, the astounding contrasts.

Lemon yellows laid hard on the richest purple, rose-madders on brilliant blue, green and carmine, copper and indigo, side by side ; films of orange over leaden cumuli, flaming network of cirrus on eau-de-nil ; and all in the one sky.

And every sunset sewn with ragged stitches of lightning, or silvered with white sheets of fire from the changing ramparts of a dozen storms.

No scenery in the world could support such splendours as does this sober wilderness of withered grass.

One learns, too, in those weeks of storm how wisely limited is the scheme on which the world was coloured. The little more, indeed, and how much it is ; how much too much it may be.

For though one craves endurance for the greens of spring and the gold of autumn, and desires generally something livelier than is dealt to us by Nature, one gazes at these painted skies with wonder, indeed, but with a sense of outrage.

Yet, perhaps in this fashion its share of beauty is handed to the wilderness in a lump.

But it has its beauties also, which appear as unexpectedly in the folds of its sunburnt downs as the vivid scarlet petals or pale stars of lemon and heliotrope which grow at wide intervals amid their grasses.

One such farm there was on the way to Welgelegen. Four hundred yards to the westward it might have been passed unseen, and even when seen there was but a thin trickle of green where the stream crept down a cleft of the upland, and a green pool of trees about a whitewashed house. Yet the dark branches of that pool bore citrons and oranges, crimson pomegranates and purple figs, and beneath them was a tangle of trailing roses, great red hybrids and filmy briars, with the cream-pink petals and tender yellows of scented teas.

And beside the careless garden walks, under the globes of golden fruit, were flaming salvias, pink and sulphur spears of hollyhocks, the dusky copper of great chrysanthemums, the garnet and white of honey-scented scabious, and beds of broken purples and gentian blue.

One passed from the wide seclusion of the wilderness through the dark grove of citron and pomegranate into this sanctuary of flowers. And, closer though the seclusion grew, while the waste was silent, the garden sang; filled with the cooing of turtle-doves and the fluttering wings of birds.

On the stoep of the house, to complete the picture, sat a girl in a white high-waisted frock, her face pale with past tears, her mouth tremulous with crying, staring over the garden at the horsemen that gathered on the wold beyond.

Within the house its head lay dying, dying of long life, and tended by an English surgeon.

Could the irony of war furnish a finer touch than the guarding by a foe of that last flicker of tired

breath, while out on the hills, where the rifles were snapping, men in the full strength of their days were seeking of others with whom they had no quarrel a sudden and unsheltered death?

CHAPTER XXI

NORTHWARD

KROONSTAD, *May 13th.*

AS week followed week in Bloemfontein we looked from its northern rampart of hills, where the sea guns thrust their noses at the four points of heaven, and wondered when we should ever cross that gray distance of the veld.

And now we are in Kroonstad, more than midway to the Vaal, with nothing worthy to be called a struggle. We have marched forward, and the Boers backward, dropping a few shells at us over their shoulders. That is the whole story: but it may have read differently in the London papers. Of what use otherwise were the despatch riders, whose horses raced into Brandfort with the details of desperate engagements, in which some one was supposed to have been wounded?

One watched them go, and wondered what they carried; wondered, too, if in national affairs it were not rather the journalists' duty to preserve proportion than to provide copy; and whether such expenditure of the 'tape' over mere skirmishes would not

make us seem somewhat ridiculous in the eyes of Europe.

The start from Bloemfontein was very skilfully managed, and our attack on Brandfort came somewhat as a surprise.

The ground from Karree, which the Seventh Division had been holding for some weeks, was absolutely open, and Brandfort itself offered small opportunity of defence.

The Boers, who will never touch ground which does not suit their tactics, only held the place long enough for their convoy to be withdrawn.

Withdrawn it was to the last wheel, and we could claim nothing on the day's fighting but occupation of the town.

That was no doubt our objective, but we achieved it, so to say, in its leanest shape.

The convoy rumbled off under our horses' noses, as indeed it rumbled the whole way to Kroonstad. The turning movement of the Mounted Infantry was most completely unsuccessful; it turned nothing, and let some of the returning enemy slip by beneath its rifles.

We camped the night and spent the next day at Brandfort, and the first repair of the railway was begun on the culvert below the town.

On the morrow, under a sun which seemed to have lost nothing of its summer strength, the column started for the Vet. At the Vet River it was to find its water, and for its water it counted on a fight.

The force which had taken Brandfort was divided,

on leaving it, into two parts—the Eleventh Division, with Hutton's Colonial Brigade of Mounted Infantry, following the railway, while General Tucker took the Seventh over the open veld on the right, moving on a front of both brigades to get in touch as soon as possible with the force under Hamilton trekking north through Winburg and Ventersburg from Thaba'nchu. Thus the three columns converged, roughly speaking, from the base to the apex of a right-angled triangle, as shown in the accompanying plan.

The convergent movement was completed by one apparently divergent, the Cavalry Division leaving Bloemfontein when the other columns were half-way to Kroonstad, and sweeping round the left wing of their approach.

It covered some hundred and forty miles in five days, and fought a continuous action on the fourth.

Its appearance across the Valsch, west of Kroonstad, cleared the enemy from their positions before the town, and its fight of the day before simplified the work which fell to the First Mounted Infantry and Third Cavalry Brigades.

But such success can hardly be held to have exhausted its possibilities, seeing that the enemy, though only reversing his decision to defend Kroonstad at the last minute, made good his escape and left not a wagon nor a gun behind him.

The object of the cavalry was not so much to persuade the Boers to abandon Kroonstad as to force them to fight there at a disadvantage, and to pay a heavy penalty for defeat.

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But to return to the march from Brandfort to the Vet.

It was an hour past a sultry noon when news reached the centre of the column that Hutton was in touch with the enemy on the left.

The exact words of the reeking galloper were that he was 'having the devil of a fight,' which one is beginning to understand out here as 'gallopese' for the noise of a field gun and some score of Mausers. But it warned us that the enemy were holding the river, and that, with but four hours of daylight to follow, the guns must go forward if we were to camp that night beside it.

The scene of the fight was a curious one, and provided an opportunity for viewing it in complete security. As a rule, in a modern action, one views very little and is extremely insecure.

The river was bent in a great arc to the northward like a drawn bow, and where, on the flat plain to the south, the arrow would have been nocked stood a little kopje which commanded the entire scene.

On the further side, save for one dark bluff to the westward, the ground ever rose as it retreated, roll on roll of brown upland in interminable perspective, to three strange humped hills that stood clear against the sky. The plain beneath us waved gently to either flank, and on its greener surface the whole advancing army was extended.

On the left the dust was spurting about the dark masses of Hutton's mounted men, and white puffs of smoke across the river told that his guns also were at work.

Immediately underneath the kopje the dammed transport was spreading into a flood of wagons; the infantry, halting in slender brown threads beyond them as the guns galloped by to take the enemy's distance.

They opened on some houses on this side the river, but the Boers replied with a couple of Creusots behind a fold of the down far up the further hill, to which our field guns could make no sort of answer.

So first the naval 12-pounders and then the big sea guns, behind their labouring black teams of oxen were sent forward to reply.

So the afternoon wore on; the Boers showing in scattered hundreds on the brown slopes beyond the stream, the white bursts of the shells marking the fighting lines on either side of the water, and our lyddite lifting the hillside to the north of it in green fumes of dust.

Hutton's Canadians and Tasmanians on the left were across the river, making some sharp fighting among the thorn bushes beyond the bluff; and just at dusk Major Pilkington's New Zealanders cleared the Boers from a kopje on the right in the pluckiest fashion, losing nearly a fourth of their number, and being really saved by darkness from extermination.

The rest was artillery.

As the sun fell the withered brown of the long slopes northward burned to a lovely madder, with the hill humps over them a sombre green; and dusk turned the madder to a purple, rich and deep, streaked with flashes of orange, as the guns still fired into the shadow of the night.

At sunset we left the kopje, and went forward to the camp, already forming just behind the guns.

It was really a quaint place for transport to out-span, as, had the Boers possessed a grain of enterprise, they would have pushed their guns forward under the darkness and smashed the wagons about our ears.

Fortunately they were entirely occupied in flight.

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The nightly creation of a camp is one of the inexhaustible pleasures of a campaign.

At noon the land lies empty and bare in front of one, beaten into brownness by the flail of the fierce sun ; no sign of man, no sound of bird or beast.

The frail undulating lines of men drift forward on either side over the grass, their brown on its brownness a mere gauzy pattern, like the filmy wings of some vast insect whose body is the dark crawling length of transport upon the road.

The sun falls, the clear twilight deepens, and the sense of space, of silence, of solitude grows more profound.

Then, as darkness gathers, and the army halts, tiny twinkling eyes of light come into being on the hills about it, eyes that speak, with their fluttering eyelids, a speech silent and fleet and secret as though it had been made for lovers.

And, sudden, as one turns from reading that chatter of flashes, the night has come, and the purple blackness of the hollows is alive with orange lights, and out over the open darkness of the plain, in clusters, strings, and scattered spaces, burn clear points of

fire, from camp and picket and bivouac, till the night seems filled with a mighty city built by magic on the wold, the lamps of whose streets are lit as no city in the world was ever lighted, with flames that six men cannot encircle, which leap blazing to a man's full height.

And into the heart of its darkness rolls the endless rumble of baggage, the wild cries of the drivers, the rifle crack of whips. And, as it rolls, voices from the darkness claim it, voices hoarse, tired, impatient, voices that break it into fragments, and lead its fragments to this or that patch of lambent fires through the intricate mazes of the new town.

The brightness of those fires is hidden an hour later by the ring of men which sits about them; the clear flame becomes a smoky glow, and the human shade around it shows half black in silhouette, half splashed with every shade of orange and ochre, black man and white with the same yellow faces, and the same gamboge costume.

And on the cool night air lies the rich odour of roasted meat in the scented heat of the herbs which cooked it.

The smoke drifts between the fires, adding fresh mystery to the camp's entanglement—the parks of wagons, the lines of guns, the sleeping oxen, the browsing mules, the black squares of horses, all penned amid the fires and the tented blankets; and on the ground the harness outspread for a start at dawn.

And, perhaps, after the camp songs have ceased and the fires are dying down, and only the sentry's challenge comes above the sleeping men, the old

moon rises and the gray ghosts of the hills come again out of the darkness, and the smoke-covered camp is wrapped in a soft veil of blue, and round the toiling groaning wagons that still trail their endless miles across the veld is drawn a silvered chrysalis of dust.

All that beauty, all that charm is spread out here for us almost nightly. Can any man complain of hardship who has these in exchange?

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On Sunday, the third after Easter, a slow short march was made up the brown upland beyond the river to the dusty streets of Smaldeel. There three dreary days were spent, and then a march on Wednesday carried us within striking distance of the Zand.

At the Zand, if Kroonstad was to be defended, a big fight was expected; but our expectations were resolved into some Artillery hammering on the right wing, where Ian Hamilton was the first to come into action, and a Cavalry skirmish which lasted all day on the left.

The Boers had better holding ground on the right, and held it as long as possible, while their other flank was fighting a rearguard action to cover the convoy's retreat.

They fought it most admirably, as they always do on such occasions, holding four brigades of Cavalry and one of Mounted Infantry at bay the whole day with little loss; spreading ever to their right as our left extended, yet never giving in that extenuation a chance which we could take.

An hour after Hamilton's guns had been pounding the hills beyond the river, Gordon's Brigade with a battery of Horse Artillery crossed the drift by the smashed railway bridge, and wheeled at once left shoulder up to turn the range of hills whose river front was whitened with Hamilton's shells.

But the enemy had cast a very careful eye in our direction, and had the range of the mealie beds through which we had to pass. He dropped shells among their dry stalks with such excellent precision that direct advance was out of the question, and the brigade wheeled to the left across the railway to try a cast further round his flank.

Then followed the hottest hour of the day. The Boers held the siding-houses and the high ground above them, and their shooting was so good that only happy fortune kept the casualties down. Five shells dropped in succession over our heads, absolutely in the line of led horses, each in the space between man and man.

Two regiments of the brigade covered, in extended order, the opposite slopes of the valley, and, while they hung there waiting for the guns, the Boers had some very pleasant shooting and the very worst of luck. The R.H.A. at last got to work on one side of the valley, and the 'pom-poms' on the other, and though the enemy paid little heed to the 12-pounders, the first string of shells from the Maxim, though 300 yards short, made him bring up his limbers.

So the fight moved ever north-westward in a not very interesting fashion, the Boers swinging round their right and we our left in a vain effort to get

behind them. At each fresh position a splutter of shells, a halt, the guns, and a new move forward.

But the fortune of the day proved conclusively that the Vickers-Maxim one-pounder is eminently the weapon for the Boers.

He sits quiet under shrapnel, and laughs at lyddite, but the 'pom-pom' moves him every time.

Only once did the snapping string of shells get in among his horses, for, as a rule, the first line of dust-bursts along his front meant 'files about' for him.

The range-finders were quite a sufficient hint that he was where he was not wanted.

After lunch the fight became more and more ragged.

We had picked up Hutton's Brigade, and French was in touch on the left of us; but the line of front was so involved and changed its shape so often that an enquiring disposition found itself frequently in equal discomfort from friend and foe.

Once, when the 'pom-poms' were passing both ways overhead, there was an admirable chance of gauging their moral value, and of observing the effect of the bursts.

An hour before dark the Boers made their last stand, and sent a string of the little shells into the mass of Hutton's Brigade; but their work was practically over, and they only waited a return of the discharge to follow the tail of their convoy across the hill.

French had meanwhile had a very similar fight on the left of us, and though his losses were very much heavier they led to no more definite result.

One had a long ride back when the fight was over, one of those irritating journeys which takes one away from a front of pressing interest for the chance of sending thirty words home. It was dark when we reached headquarters, guided by the great golden bubble of the balloon; and we arrived there to find the transport in very considerable confusion, and no sign, no hope, no knowledge of the carts in which our little world was carried. They had been stopped, as it turned out, at the drift, by an order which no one cared to own. But of that we were then ignorant, the drift was six miles further on, and to search for a cart in the darkness among the moving streams of wagons was alike to lose both it and oneself.

There was no help for it; a dinner must be begged somewhere, and the night spent, without coat or covering, in the wind that blew biting along the drenched grass, as cheerfully as possible.

I found a heap of unhusked mealies, which gave food for my horse, and had, as a mattress, a certain air of comfort. It was deceptive, since before I had lain there for five minutes my body was alive with creeping things. One knew not what they were, but they were so many that one seemed to be slipping about on their combined backs. Still, they had not begun to bite, and one hoped for the best. But it was the cold, not they, which made sleep impossible. One's feet dropped off into a frozen torpor, and one's body shook in the flimsy garments one had worn at midday. Every ten minutes one had to rise, beat one's breast, and stamp one's feet to keep alive. So the night passed, not happily. And, before dawn, a

fresh move forward ; coatless, cartless, breakfastless ; one's body still a promenade for countless insects, which proved to be weevils, and had to wreak their creeping will for the next fifteen hours.

Such occasions are not joyful, but they come to an end, and one is none the worse for them.

We camped next night within striking distance of Kroonstad, but the enemy was flown before the morrow, and the town dropped without a blow into our hands.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DAYS OF DUST

KROONSTAD, *May 17th.*

THERE may be drearier places to live in, but for any ordinary purpose of self-mortification Kroonstad should serve.

It is a jumble of whitewashed, tin-roofed, one-storied houses stuck apart in dust, with the dark huts of a native stad on its northern end.

In sheer stupid ugliness it differs little from South African towns ; it is, as they, the product of a people without the sweetening sense of beauty, without the softening touch of dream.

But in dust it has its own pre-eminence ; all the more apparent now that an army has passed over it and beaten it daily beneath the feet of its endless oxen and of its countless mules.

De Aar earned fame by its never-resting 'devils,' Modder River by its red storms of blinding sand ; but Kroonstad's dust is of another feature.

It does not drive and settle, it does not whirl and fall. It raises faintly, softly, with the first stir of feet

after the dawn, as mist rises on the river meadows, just as frail, just as light, almost as white, scarcely less beautiful ; rises to the axles, rises above the wheels, hides the wagons, passes over the houses, and hangs, obliterating, above the town.

The streets are filled with it as by a London fog ; figures cannot be recognised on the further side of them, sometimes cannot be seen.

Its denseness gathers till the afternoon, its grayness grows ; but always as a fog, a floating mist, of one even and imponderable thickness.

But in the great drift of the Valsch the dust is a very different affair.

There, where the steep road falls between its sandy banks a hundred feet to the wide stony bed of the river, one's arm could be plunged to the elbow in whitish-yellow shoals of dust.

The road descends in a great serpentine to the water on its western side, and on the other climbs steeply to the town.

Thereby, a week ago, Lord Roberts rode into the defenceless streets, and the foreguard of his tired army strode reeking and erect behind him.

There, now, groans and labours a twisted misery of living things. The dust and sand boil up from the beaten road in streaming wreaths of gray and yellow. The broad river-bed is filled as with the fumes of a caldron, which rise from it in a dense and cloudy column above the banks, above the town, above the roll of hills around it, till from afar it looks like that misty pillar which stood before the vanguard of another host.

But the place over which this pillar stands is no seat of mercy.

Down into that darkness goes every cart and creature that follows the army, and at the foot of its murky foulness struggles all that is inglorious in the agonies of war.

When the dust-clouds part the place looks like a dim Inferno filled with the swaying horns and the straining shapes of beasts.

Heads of oxen, black and red, with imploring patient uncomprehending faces; teams of mules, their ribs and panting nostrils plastered yellow with water and sweat and sand; the hard-driven horses of orderlies, snorting at the flick of a whip-lash or the prick of a horn. One sees for a moment, through the choking surging wreaths, a long dark medley of writhing beasts; then the wreaths roll over, and only the wild yells remain of the Kaffir drivers, the oaths and orders, the ceaseless crack and sweep of the heavy whips.

Once, crossing to the further side amid the jolting roar of rail-laden carts, but with only the clear splash of the water to guide one's horse's feet, the yellow fog broke about the open tilt of a wagon, in which sat a woman on a huddle of household goods, one hand gripping a child beside her as the wagon rose on end out of the stream.

Her face had the sweet gravity, the calm beauty which tells of a youth tranquilly surrendered, but out of it were staring, across the suffocating reek, eyes with the terrible clearness of inconsolable pain.

It was framed there, unreal as a vision, for an

instant only ; the next, the sandy vapour closed like a curtain about it, and one had made, with held breath, a dash past it up the stifling steepness of the drift.

Yet there it seems still to stand : type of all the pain, vain or availing, wrung from labouring weakness in every river valley on our conquering road.

For the ford of the Valsch is but one drift of many, and no worse than the rest. Only the others have had before them the expectancies of a march or the gay front of a battle.

One goes through those forgetful, with eyes set forward,

Here one sees !

Kroonstad, within doors, bears, as significantly as without, the traces of an army. The dining-rooms of the hotels, the pavement of the churches, are absolutely floored with the sick. Grass mattresses, for lack of bedding, are spread on the ground, close as they can go ; and on each, wrapped in its dingy blanket, a limp useless suffering form.

Often the mattress and the blanket are absent, and the sick men are laid one against the other across the floor.

Those grim camp-followers, dysentery and enteric, are still with us ; it is they, to-day, who take the hindermost.

Out from the market square a long line of open yellow wagons stretch across the town. It is dusk, the sun is down, the dust is settling as the air grows cooler ; the mules stand, weary of waiting, with drooping heads. Behind each of the first three wagons are black heaps which take in the twilight

the shape of sleeping oxen ; coming nearer they are seen to be of men : men wrapped in their greatcoats, lying in the deep dust, their faces hidden in their arms, figures of utter abandonment.

Every hoof and passing wheel covers them with a fresh coat of defilement, which falls unheeded on their faces. They are past heeding, past reproach.

They only wait the moment, for some cause deferred, which shall place them in the wagons and start them, sitting jammed together, for their slow journey on springless axles through the long cold night.

Influences of this kind, doubtless, would dim the appeal of more charming spots. And Kroonstad has its attractions.

Coming into it from an endless undulation of brown upland one thanked Heaven, even in the disappointment of a fight foregone, for the vision of its trees.

And the valley of the Valsch, cut deep to a broad stony bed, dark and tortuous, and serrated with the mazes of extraordinary dongas, has in places a quite evil air of mystery.

That is its particular quality ; but those reaches are more admired which have been tamed for boating and made picturesquely commonplace.

The ground beyond the Bloemspruit and about the Valsch gives an impression of defencibility which further acquaintance does not confirm.

Certainly, if an army would select the most difficult approach, Kroonstad could be held by a very small number ; but one cannot always count on an army being so obliging.

Allowing any acumen to its opponents, six thousand men could not have delayed for more than twenty-four hours the force we brought against it, and the Boers were soundly advised to attempt no defence.

They might have omitted also that dramatic scene in the trenches which Mr. Michael Davitt found so affecting: the passionate appeals to their Maker, the frenzied display of patriotism, the solemn oaths to shed in those ditches the last drop of their blood. Possibly a Boer, after going to some trouble to dig trenches, would sooner use them for purposes of perjury than let them go entirely to waste. He certainly prefers to swear in them than to fight.

And that last drop of his blood has gone a long way since he first vowed to spill it. We only hope that he may be keeping it for Pretoria.

The downs between Kroonstad and the Zand form the queerest fighting-ground conceivable. Not roll on roll in orderly sequence as downs should go, but alternate rounded mound and rounded hollow, with slopes only just perceptible and confines almost circular.

The mounds are shaped like full-grown mushrooms, seven miles across; the hollows as if moulded by the mushroom turned upside down.

One canters to what seems the centre of the rise to find nothing but a bare horizon of falling ground about one, and on the apparent rim of the hollows one finds oneself under observation from some twenty miles of sky.

A more difficult configuration for the employment

of cavalry against guns it would be hard to imagine, and to its difficulties may be attributed, on the march to Kroonstad, some measure of the cavalry's ill-success.

Of that, one of the most interesting features was the failure of the 'white arm' to do more than the most trifling damage on the occasion offered it.

The impression made by our Hussars upon the Transvaal cavalry will not form pleasant reflection for the advocates of the sword.

But the least satisfactory part of the cavalry advance was the time in which it had to be compressed.

A hundred and forty miles in five days, of which two might have to be spent fighting, sounds no very considerable achievement for horsemen on paper or of the past ; but it is a great deal to ask of British cavalry in South Africa.

And no point of strategy was responsible for the demand.

It is true that the name of French was deleted from every cable despatched for a fortnight north of Bloemfontein, but one must consider that rather an eccentricity of the Censor than as the needful part of a surprise.

Where the Boers are concerned we are apt to flatter our astuteness in the matter of surprises. Our physical achievements have occasionally astonished them, but our mental unexpectedness has not been of the kind we would desire. And since French's movements could as easily have been kept a secret from Smaldeel as from Bloemfontein, we may presume

that sixty-five miles were added to his forced marching for some better reason than surprise.

The reason may easily be found in his attenuated squadrons; for not lead, nor dynamite, nor sickness have been chiefly responsible for our delays, but horses.

One might imagine that those in authority responsible for remounts would have some acquaintance with the effect of war on horseflesh. Yet, though war has been five months in progress, we had to wait seven weeks at a critical period in Bloemfontein, with mobility crippled and effective blows unstruck, before even a proportion of our mounted men could be rehorsed.

If such delays are to be attributed to Fate, one would like, as Mr. Spenser Wilkinson suggests, to learn who Fate is—and hang him.

Even when at last the cavalry started, it was to a considerable extent composed of unseasoned horses recently landed, certain to be crippled by sudden hard work for the remainder of the campaign.

Meanwhile, horsemen wait, in bases and places where they do not sing, with only saddles left them to bestride, and not always with these.

But the army marches. Dams are cut, stores are burnt, bridges blown up in front of it, but the army marches.

Buller from the eastward, Roberts from southward, Hunter from south-westward, Plumer from the westward, and Carrington from the north.

The eagles are gathering with wings spread half about this land which has made itself carrion, and

to the throat which challenged them the lion's cubs are coming from the sea.

In that progress the work of the Engineers will remain to be told when all is over.

To-day one can but express a gratefully astonished appreciation ; the magnitude of the labour may not yet be measured.

Only those who have marched, by mile on mile of railway, through drifts beside the shattered bridges, past culverts where the rail-arms are flung up to heaven, as if in horrified protest at such destruction, can know the sentiments with which we regard the Sappers' achievement of bringing Railhead in little over a fortnight across three rivers and through the wreckage of ninety miles.

On their progress everything depended; for in this foul dust we must have remained till the blessed whistle of an engine sounded again in our ears.

Has it been told yet in England how the tired men who had marched from the Modder heard, as they neared Bloemfontein, the shrill scream of the locomotive, and flung up their battered helmets at the sound of it and shouted themselves hoarse with joy ?

To such things we come ; to adoration of the railway ; to the theft of horses ; to a wild strife for jam.

Here, at the worst gap of any between the Orange and the Vaal, the railway will meet its briefest check, for eight hundred men have been working night and day on the deviation, and now the long serpentine down either bank is almost completed, and the bridge-work only needs its girders.

The woodwork of the temporary piers has been fastened to the old foundations by sinking beams into the bases of the old stone piers and clamping them to the solid rock.

These bases, all that remains of the old bridge, extend across the dry bed as well as through the flooded channel, and have materially shortened our toil.

But excellent repairers of a line as the R.E. have proved themselves, one could wish that with its completion their labour ended, and that its running was always put into civil hands. It is quite impossible for men who not only have but the smallest practical acquaintance with the detail work of a railway system, but who are quite ignorant of the idiosyncrasies of the line they handle, effectively to take the place of those whose lives have been spent on a time-table, and who know by heart the whims in all weathers of each section of the line they work. The experience of the entire campaign has proved that the transfer of any portion of a line from the military to the civil power resulted immediately in an improved service.

The R.E. would have done more in all men's estimation if they had not done so much.

CHAPTER XXIII

KROONSTAD TO THE VAAL

VEREENIGING, *May 27th.*

THERE is nothing in life so imposing as forgetfulness — to use imposture in both its senses.

At every turn of fortune we are apt straightway to forget not only what manner of men we are, but the manner of men likewise that our neighbours may be.

True, since our impressions of knowledge come mostly from so faint a die, it is in no wise remarkable that memory will not retain them.

Marching, day after day, in the vain hope of a fight, in a track which is noisy still with Dutch bluster, the memory of that black week in December, when disaster followed disaster, west, south, and east, is almost obliterated.

Then there was no phrase too full for the enemy's achievement and no guess too grave to forecast the future. The Boer was everything that our fancy had not painted him, and England was nothing that our hopes foretold.

Now we go from camp to camp, from siding to siding, and from spruit to vlei, in vain vituperation of a foe who will not stand and face us.

Ian Hamilton's column, indeed, had a kick of its heels in a rearguard action, and snapped its teeth on the tail of a convoy; but we in the centre were forced to be contented with observing where the enemy had been.

Had the prophecies of the Intelligence 'come off' we should have had our fill of fighting, but they were always some three days in rear of the event.

On the Rhenoster were pinned our chief hope of resistance; so also, it transpired, were the Boers'.

As a position it offered a variety of advantages. First, coiled across its front is the Rhenoster River, running east to west in a vast grassy plain which slopes ever so gently down to its either border. The river, unlike any we have crossed in South Africa, unsheltered by a tree, unsignalled by a wisp of green, is cut sheer as a Boer shelter trench, with banks of sandstone, often quite precipitous, some twenty-five yards apart, to a clear trickle of water forty feet below the surface.

Ten thousand horsemen could have been hidden in the river-bed and withdrawn in absolute concealment to the drifts on either flank. Yet so steeply were the banks cut that the presence of a river could not be suspected until one was close upon it.

The river was the Boers' first line of defence, and, wherever landslips had lowered accessible platforms on the southern side, squared spaces had been cut for riflemen along the edge. Not a spadeful of earth

had been thrown on to the surface, and the work done was quite indiscernible until one stood above it. On the walls of some of these spaces the words 'Irish Brigade' were engraved; but this was the only advertisement permitted to its traitorous ambition, for the Boers at present prefer digging trenches to defending them, and the words in the unfought lines remained, when the writers of them were fled, as a mocking commentary on men who would fight against their country.

The railway runs at right angles to the river, and along half a mile on the southern bank and for some distance on the other was a scene of almost vicious destruction.

The bridge was, of course, in ruins, and all the culverts blown into the air; but, in addition, caverns were scooped every few yards out of the permanent way, and the rails flung up in wild attitudes of distortion. For a considerable distance there was more iron on end than on the sleepers, making the strangest effect imaginable—some madhouse dream of a dividing fence.

The railway had no influence on the position, offering no cover, and only slightly obscuring the enemy's field of fire. It ran some 1,500 yards from the north bank over a level plain before disappearing round the eastern corner of a kopje which formed the centre of the position. This hill, which was really the advanced edge of a plateau, was powdered with ironstone boulders, and had a face too steep for assault.

Thus guns could have been removed northward at

a gallop from its very crest without a visible hint of removal; while in shape it formed almost an ideal advanced work, affording a cross-fire not only along its own front but across the main position on either flank. This, the remaining edge of the plateau, was more gently sloped and had been prepared with trenches, and there were gun positions in echelon on either flank.

With a dozen guns a brigade could have held it indefinitely against a division and a brigade of cavalry; but our line was too long for it, and before French was over the drift to the eastward the Boers were gone.

So fell, undefended, the last position in the Orange State, and Driefontein remains, as was here predicted, its final battle.

The advance of triangular convergence, as explained in the march on Kroonstad, was adopted in our further progress.

Hamilton went eastward to Lindley, and drew in on Heilbron to squeeze the country against the railway and Lord Roberts's column.

From Heilbron he turned due east as though to join us, but passed instead across our front, and went on north-eastward to support French.

Had he pushed straight ahead he would have struck the railway, as the Boers feared, at Wolvehoek, and might have cut off and captured the 'Long Tom,' which was being dragged back along the line from the Rhenoster on a damaged trolley.

As things were, however, he afforded the most interesting spectacle of one force with its huge train of transport crossing another at right angles.

As the head of our column crept over Prospect Hill the tail of his was ebbing through the drifts beneath it, and the valley eastward was filling with moving masses of men and beasts.

A spreading fan of horsemen, brown battalions of infantry, sombre batteries of guns, teams beyond teams of mules and oxen, the white-hooded ambulance in ordered rows, and huge parks of wagons, acre on acre choked with seeming confusion, but each part moving in its ordered turn.

And across and over its wake came the dark flood of our advance, submerging the stragglers and drawing the unwary into its obliterating way.

Four miles to the westward the process was repeated, though here it was Hamilton that waited, while Tucker's force filed past before him.

A curious effect of this alteration in our front was discovered when we reached the Vaal, for the Boers, with attention previously directed to Hamilton's column, mistook it for the main advance, and left the principal part of their rearguard to oppose its expected crossing at Engelsbreckt's Drift; Hamilton heading meanwhile for Lindeque, many miles to the westward, and Lord Roberts's column crossing at Viljoen's almost unopposed.

We have paid dear for the moon we lost during our long wait at Kroonstad, but the pitchy nights have brought one compensation in the loveliness they have added to the veld fires.

The Boers were at first reported as the incendiaries, with the intention of producing a dark background to render visible our men's khaki. The

intention was an excellent one ; only, since the enemy never waited till our men were in sight, the means taken to attain a background seemed superfluous.

The fires are really mostly due to some smoker's carelessness, and, though one was exceedingly wroth with the cause, the effect compelled one's admiration.

By day nothing is visible but vast smoky curtains of cloudy amber yellows and tender misty chalcedony grays, which creep in a devouring veil over the dry brown grass.

But with twilight the smoke suddenly disappears, and in its place the veld seems covered with spreading camps of flame.

The apparent increase of distance which darkness causes lends correlatively to every visible object in it a seeming increase of size. So the licking flicker that climbed the topmost grasses half a mile distant appears transformed into a tent of flame five miles away, and the wide spaces of the darkness seem filled with the camps of the spirits of fire.

Words cannot tell their beauty nor paint their changing shapes. Mile-long lines of tiny lights, fan-like zones of crimson fire, circling cordons of topaz clearness, broad fringes that glow like gold.

And, with it all, not a shred of smoke, not a hint of burning.

To all appearance evening brings the vision of these living bivouacs of flame. Suddenly they are there, as though the dusk had revealed them ; and the night is filled with the sense of strange presences, to whom the lonesome darkness of the veld belongs.

With every breath of air fresh tents are pitched,

saffron and amber, rose and amethyst ; as about one's resting-place this strange army spreads its wings of fire.

But their beauty, like many another, exacts its price ; for when the veld is thus alight in all directions one has to sleep with an eye on the wind.

But for some reason, perhaps the gathering of the heavy dew, the fires mostly burn low by midnight, and are vanished long before the dawn. The sun rises scarlet on a world of sooty blackness, in which not one brown blade remains.

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Though the parching lack of water is still with us, it is overshadowed by the dearth of wood.

In the scorching days which left the breath of their heat hanging deep into the night, when drink was the preoccupation of every mind, firewood was more plentiful and much less wanted.

Now, when the sun has little heat three hours after his rising, and a chill falls like water the instant the short winter's day is done, a fire is more needed to warm the man than his rations ; yet even the bush, which served the double purpose along the Modder, has ceased to exist.

For burning there remain only grass and the railway ; and even the railway sleepers are made of iron.

It has, however, on other side, a wire boundary fence, with uprights of Knysna sneezewood, and on these the greater part of the central column depends nightly for its dinner. Sneezewood is hard enough to blunt an axe, and hot enough to melt it. Even insects resign its demolition to the tougher teeth of

Time, and Time has to take himself to its destruction.

It is a curious sight, the instant camp is pitched, when the tired men swarm to the railway with axes, bills, and picks, hack through the stout wire strands, and then fall on the stubborn standards.

And strange, so near the tropic, that wood for warmth should be one of the things for which existence struggles.

And struggle it is. To the foot-soldier fatigue counts for nothing beside fuel. He straps every combustible fragment he can gather by the way—wood, or brush, or dung—on to the load which he already carries, and throws the heavier pieces across his shoulder.

The cavalryman comes in with beams and branches ten-foot long across his saddle, and every spare or lame beast carries its load.

The cow-guns are hung with chunks of timber, and each wagon has a heap of broken cases added to its supplies.

The dismantling of deserted houses is, with fuel at such a premium, a speedy affair. The doors are smashed from their hinges, lintel and side posts wrenched from the brickwork, the window-sashes follow, the flooring is torn up, the eaves broken into fragments, sometimes even the roof-tree is dragged out. Any article of furniture is pounced on at once; chairs, tables, and chests of drawers may be seen going into camp on the backs of the spoilers.

The whole place is gutted, as with a passion for destruction, of everything that can be consumed; fire and the need for fire having the same result.

Thanks to the retreating disposition of the Boer in warfare, one has been able, during the recent march, to pitch one's private camp some few miles ahead of the main body.

Camp companionship is charming, but the silence and loneliness of the veld have a charm more exclusive and only to be realised in this land of far distances. It needs but the presence of prowling beasts to complete the rare allurements of isolation and to fill the sense of mystery to its full measure.

There is no moment so full of an unreasonable content as when, the day's march over and the evening meal ended in the early dark, one flings a fresh log on the fire, and stretches oneself on the ground beside its burning core.

The firelight beats the darkness back into a circuit of more intense obscurity; an obscurity which seems to dart devouringly forward as each flame falls. Sometimes its border is broken by the ghostly head of a lost horse or mule thrust stupidly into the glare, but for the most part nothing moves upon the silent veld, nothing speaks but the crackling fire.

Only that world continues which flickers in the fringes of its dancing flames: beyond is the blackness of the night and an immense forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXIV

ACROSS THE VAAL

GERMISTON, *May 29th.*

ON Saturday, May 26th, Colonel Henry's Mounted Infantry reached the Vaal. The river at Viljoen's Drift is a very ordinary affair: a plain blue-brown stream of water between plain brown banks; the drift firm and gently shelving on dark blue pebbles, and, when we crossed it, some three feet deep. On the south side one reaches it over a four-mile waste of sand, deep and yielding, terribly distressing through the long hot hours to every beast of transport that strained across it.

The station of Viljoen's Drift is in the midst of the waste, and there the railway parts from the road; one running north-eastward to the bridge at Vereeniging, the other north-westward to the drift. About the station is a dreary assemblage of tin houses, and the long black chimney shafts of coal mines lend the landscape its last dismal feature.

It was not of the picturesque that one was thinking as dawn broke on the 27th, and the glasses levelled on the station as the light increased were in search

of something in more concrete shape. The object we were looking for loomed presently along the line with a streamer of white smoke and the faintest ghost of a whistle. It was the dynamite train of the Netherlands Railway, come for the last time across the bridge to loot the stores at Viljoen's Drift. We watched it, wondering if the cavalry sweeping round out of sight to our right would reach the bridge in time to save it and to cut off the train.

But the driver got wind of its approach, the looters scrambled back hastily on the trucks they had just quitted, and the engine dragged them out of the station with a disappointed and vindictive snort. We sent a volley after it as a send off, but the range was too great.

Half an hour later a dull roar and up-burst of white smoke told us that the bridge had gone the way of all the others which we had not crossed from the Orange to the Vaal. It presented, however, when we saw it later, a very different appearance from those which had been the Free State's property ; only a single span of the lattice girder work being blown out, and the masonry remaining practically undamaged.

It is true that we had contrived to cut the wires connected with other blasting charges, but it is very doubtful if the Boers took serious interest in the destruction of their own property ; for the line from the Vaal northwards, which belonged to the Netherlands Company, in which all bad Transvaalers have a share, wore its pristine polish immaculately preserved.

The rails glittered, the varnish gleamed, the water-

tanks showed an undented surface, not even the points had been misplaced. The contrast between the lines in the two countries offered a most amusing commentary on the Boer character. No prosecution of the war could be too vigorous so long as another paid for it. The State line in Orange territory was ruined by a quite stupid waste of dynamite, but not a cartridge was laid on the private line of the Transvaal. That is very much to be a Dutchman. Throughout this entire business the Free State has had to take on its back the blows the Transvaal had provoked.

Paul Kruger saw the advantage of fighting his own war in another man's country, and of testing the possibilities of defeat where defeat would be least expensive. Steyn, with the stupid cunning of an absurd ambition, was the dupe of the man he had hoped to supplant; and the Free State thus became the tool of one who was but the tool of another.

However, before a glance at the line beyond the river was to confirm our conjectures as to the future of the war, there was a brisk little fight at Viljoen's Drift. It proved a more useful affair than we knew at the time, for the men who fought were on their way to blow in the shafts of the principal coal mines on the further bank.

The story goes that the work had been entrusted to various villains of the Irish Brigade under Blake, who had been kept by the wily manager of the mines supplied with such excellent whisky that no duty had appealed to them so much as the drinking of it.

Whether they or others woke that morning with a sense of functions unfulfilled, the 'pom-pom' soon

closed the door on their opportunity. They dodged the Lee-Metford bullets among the tin houses, but without getting much nearer their destination, but the first line of little shells that lifted the dust along the dull road to Vereeniging made them exchange the safety of galvanised walls for that of five thousand yards of veld.

So the mines were saved, the drift was won, and three days' forage at Viljoen fell into our hands: a brief, cheap, and useful bit of fighting.

Thus the valley of the Vaal from Fourteen Streams to Vereeniging came under our control, and, had Buller but been where he should have been, the whole border would have fallen to us.

The boast of holding it was an exceeding vain one; for the men who boasted could not have held it with 30,000 added to those who failed. But their failure, even as things were, might have been a little less conspicuous, and we should have been made to pay a better price for our success.

Our camp that night was south of the river, in the midst of the lonely sands: the mounted men about the drift some four miles beyond it, the main body about the same distance to the south. Twilight hid the ugly houses, and drew the chimneys to mysterious lengths; and beyond the level shadowy land lay lengths of purple hills under the clearness of a sea-green sky.

It was our last night on the soil we had trodden for unnumbered weeks, and there, in the loveliness of evening and of unwonted slopes, stood the land, not of promise, indeed, but of broken promise,

to which we were come to teach the keeping of faith.

To and fro between the river and headquarters men galloped with excited interest, orderlies and aide-de-camps, transport officers and engineers, men of much business and men of none, and by the new camp-fire they stopped and told their tale, and asked their way, and drank to the country they were to conquer beyond the river, all in that strange elation with which great events, like wine, inflate the mind—merry, talkative, determined, and relieved.

And later, through the earlier darkness of the night, others would appear suddenly out of its blackness, over the silent carpet of sand, in the halo round the solitary fire, like ghosts in khaki—attracted as moths to the flame, and lost in the sandy waste to all sense of where they were—to depart again into the darkness with blood warmed and bearings readjusted.

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On the morrow Lord Roberts led the Eleventh Division across the Vaal, Tucker following with the Seventh, and headquarters were at Vereeniging, a place of bad water and little wood. There, perhaps, it would have had to remain some days longer but for the forage opportunely captured at Viljoen's Drift. Instead, however, of waiting, a long march was made which brought our outposts to the Klip River. More forage fell to us on the way, and the guns of an unknown action pounded all day on our left among the Klip River mountains, where French and, conjecturally, Hamilton were forcing their way

round the west of the berg, in order to threaten Johannesburg from Florida, as we from Germiston.

That night the veld burned in wondrous curves of fire about us among the hills, drawing their contours in lines of flame, an effect far more lovely than the downs had shown us, for the slopes seemed lit with the brilliant illumination of long leagues of streets.

But night in that bend of the river was very cold. The white mists from the water caught the glare of the fires where the stream wound among the hills, and floated in a soft foam of crimson and copper amid the clear bright flames. But the mist was more than chilly, and morning showed our blankets whitened with hoar frost, and ice set from our breath on the canvas pillow. The fire had burned out before midnight, the water in the kettle was almost solid, and one could have stood on that in the pail.

A toilet before dawn under such conditions is but indifferently successful, and an occasion rather for hilarity than humour; but it was hastened by the prospect of a fight, as Colonel Henry's Australasians clattered past in the darkness, for the junction of the Natal Railway was but a few miles off, and Germiston, where the Johannesburg line joins it, but half as far further.

The loss of the two junctions would be for the Boers more serious than a battle; and, if further resistance were intended, it was incredible that they would not defend them. They did defend them after a fashion, their own especial fashion, which, save as a means of making an absolutely useless end to a few lives, has nothing whatever to commend it.

The fighting began just beyond Natal Spruit, along the rolls of hill that run east and west, south of Johannesburg; the enemy disclosing their possession of a 'pom-pom' and two 15-pounders. The west was clearly the tactical flank for an attack, but Colonel Henry, after testing the enemy's intentions, held his left against the guns, and swung round his right in ever-increasing circles to cut the Pretorian line north of Germiston, which had been damaged by Burnham single-handed three days before.

On the left, after driving back our dismounted men with accurate but ineffective fusillades from their Vickers-Maxim, the enemy, finding his left threatened by Henry's turning movement, withdrew slowly from crest to crest of the three parallel ridges in front of Germiston, imagining doubtless that movement to be directed against his safety.

As the Boers fell back on the town the little force left to hold them occupied their positions, rising at last above the Rand Victoria in full view of the town.

The effect was curious of coming thus from the veld on a valley full of machinery, bristling with chimneys and head shafts, coloured by heaps of tailings, and with a great town filling its western end.

Trains were shunting in and out of the station, smoke from the pumping engines rose from some of the chimneys, and save for an occasional distant thud from Henry's guns there was no suggestion of war.

The ground slopes down to the great dam before the Simmer and Jack, and, taking what cover it could, the little band of Mounted Infantry made its

way to the level by the railway which runs straight into the town, where the ground is broken by great prospecting trenches.

On the open bit of common between these and the houses there was a sharp piece of fighting, our men having to fall back, losing a third of their number, two officers being hit in a plucky attempt to bring in a man whom they thought was wounded.

Silence followed the retirement. The guns on the right had ceased to fire, the trains continued to run to and fro, the enemy made no further sign. With reinforcements a dash might have been made for the station, but the reinforcements were for the moment behind the hill, knee-deep in a duck pond, looting fowl. The wounded were laid on the floor of the siding house, the horses led down under cover and watered at the dam; the men lying behind the trench heaps for three long hours.

A little further to the right, where another isolated effort was being made to enter the town, one of those picturesque incidents occurred which happen so much more rarely than they are described. Two troopers had been shot, one fatally, as the men cantered back to cover. The horse of the other stopped when its master fell, and, after standing by him for some time, walked over and took a look at the dead man. Then it came back to the other, rubbing him with his nose, and pretending to go away without him. At last, as if realising the wounded man's condition, it knelt down beside him, the trooper making several ineffectual attempts to scramble into the saddle.

The enemy, with a marksmanship on a par with

his humanity, tried to knock over the horse, which started to its feet at each near whistle of the bullet, and at last scampered off as if hit by one. The trooper then, with body bent and arms hanging, managed to stagger, a few yards at a time, to the shelter of the railway, the whistle of the Mauser following his every movement.

There, raising himself on one arm, he waved the other to his horse, which cantered back at the signal to the rest of the troop. The trooper, it is perhaps needless to add, was a colonial.

After these two defeated attempts to force an entry, it seemed improbable that any further effort would be made; however, as the place gave little promise of further resistance, two of us rode forward to have a look at the town.

The common made an awkwardly open approach, but as no advantage was taken of its lack of cover, we had become convinced of the enemy's retirement, when a few single shots, followed by a sharp clatter of musketry, broke out round the railway station on our right. Street fighting is always an entertaining affair, and this was unexpected also.

On the side walks little knots of people were talking of the day's engagement, thinking it to be at an end. Then had come this sudden scurry and alarm. Women fluttered screaming with flying skirts across the road from one place to another of deceptive safety, or stood peering with faces of terror from more distant doorways. Meanwhile the firing quickened, and bullets began to dance over the roofs of the tin houses like the first heavy stones of a hailstorm.

In the station people were crouching under the platform, or pressed huddled against its one brick wall ; others crawled between the wheels of trucks.

The bullets sang against the windows and whipped through the shelters of corrugated iron, and then, with a new twist on them, went shrilling down the streets.

Men were galloping up now to the station in ones and twos, and the sudden spurts of dust about their horses proved that the Boers holding the blue tailing heap above it could see them come.

Women squealed as the bullets passed them, and there was a shriek from half a dozen when a trooper's horse floundered and came down on the flags.

It was all very quaint, and much more like melodrama than an event of life and death ; but that is the charm of street fighting—its extraordinary air of unreality. The reality was there. A man lay on the platform, pushed up against the wall, with a great patch of cloth blown out above his thigh, where some foul bullet had passed out through his leg ; and a Boer was lying back against the white slope of cyanide ash with his throat visible through the gap which had held his eye. And below were the women, peering and screaming, and starting hysterically at each fresh phase of the fight.

It was, all told, a small affair, but a piece of interesting colour, the only piece of the kind, so far, in the campaign.

Finding that our fire was growing hotter, the enemy slunk behind their heap and made off across the hill, leaving us in possession of the junction.

Rejoining my companion, we headed for the main street, watching meanwhile a thick blue cloud of dust rising round a tailing of the Simmer and Jack, five hundred yards away, caused, as we learned later, by the withdrawal of four of the Boer guns.

They were happily in no mood for delay, since they could have swept what was left of our men from the valley, and blown the station about the ears of those who were holding it, but retired peacefully in the track of the main force.

Meanwhile, in front of the post-office a few yards ahead was a commotion more interesting than we supposed. Being a commotion we let it evaporate before advancing, and only learnt later what had been its cause.

Major MacEwen, with Lord Cecil Manners and a non-commissioned officer, had entered the telegraph office to secure official despatches, and while there had been surrounded by some fifty Boers.

Cecil Manners, always disposed to accept casually the most imposing front of misfortune, suggested blandly to his sergeant that the men seemed anxious to surrender their arms. The men, however, levelled their rifles the wrong end forward, with an unmistakable intention. "I am afraid," said Manners mournfully, to MacEwen, "that we are undone." And so indeed, it proved.

Meanwhile, unaware of the ill-fortune which had followed the *Morning Post* in the capture of yet another Correspondent, we went on into the town, finding the townsfolk as civilly insincere as usual, and anxious to offer the tribute of a whisky and soda,

which seems to be recognised out here as the conqueror's prerogative.

The troops withdrew at nightfall beyond the town, but, after guiding a company of the Yorks to protect the Simmer and Jack East Mine from threatened injury, we spent, under one of its friendly roofs, an admirable evening.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST LAP

SES MYL SPRUIT, *June 4th.*

THE morning of May 30th found us in Germiston, eight miles east of Johannesburg along the Rand. The army lay to the south across the valley, spread out on the slopes of the hill.

Of its immediate intentions we knew nothing ; but with Johannesburg so persuasively at hand a guess at what they might be did not seem difficult.

All wires had been cut ; no communication existed with the city ; the Kaffirs alternately reported that the Boers were holding it and that they were not.

However, with a foe on either flank, and their retreat threatened, it was obvious that, if holding it, their tenure must prove a short one, and that meanwhile Johannesburg would afford that most interesting spectacle—a city in two minds.

The spectacle is so rare and so informing, since only war and tumult can produce it, and its visible moments so evanescent, that a little indiscretion may perhaps be pardoned in those who would obtain a view.

One must ask pardon also for a too personal note in the narrative, for the army spent the day under its blankets, and its influence was for the moment purely statical.

I had come into Germiston with Mr. Buxton, who, hailing from the Rand, was well acquainted with the country, and we started together on Tuesday morning to enter Johannesburg, if possible, by the Bezuidenhout Valley road, hoping thus to escape the attentions of our own pickets, who were almost entirely on the southern side.

The plan succeeded, for we had almost reached the eastern outskirts of the city when our way was barred by a troop of Henry's Horse, who stated that the town was still in possession of the enemy, and that an attack on the waterworks was about to begin.

Of course the news merely added piquancy to the undertaking, and the mounted infantryman's statement was promptly confirmed by a scattered rattle of rifle shots in the dark woods on the opposite hill.

There in the wooded valley, and along the slopes beneath the waterworks, on which Doornfontein rises to the crest of the hill, this queer little fight went on all day; but at that hour it was impossible to guess within what limits it would be confined, for the Boers might have been holding the whole hill-line north of the city.

The streets of Troyville and Jeppe's Town were almost deserted; the sun shone hot on their emptiness; many of the windows were barricaded with

planks of wood. There was an air of distrust and uncertainty among the few people moving ; the whole place had the appearance of a rabbit-warren after a gunshot. The inhabitants seemed likely at any moment to make a dash for their holes, and turned their heads uneasily as each fresh crackle of the rifles came across to them from the hill.

A little further on Mr. Buxton made a burglarious entry into his own house, which appeared to have been lived in during his absence by half a dozen families, each of whom had appropriated some of his property and left an undesirable remnant of theirs.

The latest tenants got wind of his arrival and appeared in tears, and while he explained his pacific intentions to the crowd of weeping women, I secured a charming villa in view of an enforced residence in Johannesburg, and, putting both houses into the cleaners' hands, we went in search of forage. The path of an army is a great destitution of everything one most requires, and a very short experience persuades one to go where it is going rather than where it has been. The forage was forthcoming at a reasonable price, which a day later could not have been had for money ; and, the possibilities of the future thus provided for, we could turn an eye on what was happening.

No sound came from the south, no floating trail of dust, no appearance of activity. War seemed, as a wave, to have receded from the city, leaving just this ripple beating still against the hill.

The scene was sufficiently curious ; groups, mostly

of women, stood here and there on points of vantage to see what was going on, for all the world as though the whole thing were but a pantomime. In the wood itself was a tableau even more absurd.

Half-way up the slope in a clearing of the pines stood a red-brick bungalow. Against its wall, their backs together, their faces turned to the three quarters of heaven, like a group of the Graces, were three young girls.

They were dressed alike in white chiffon, each with a big filmy bow of distinguishing colour at the throat.

They had run in from the woods at the first whistle of the bullets, and made, like three frail white flowers about one stem, the prettiest picture of scarcely realised alarm.

After them crept, like ferrets from the darkness of the pines, a dozen figures in khaki; crawled along the ground to the slight shelter of a terrace, and laid their rifles out along the turf. The girls watched them with fascinated but quite unfrightened eyes, giving a charming little shudder together at each bark of the cordite.

The men were more interested in their unseen opponents than in these very obvious spectators, but a corporal nearest the corner of the house turned his cheek with a wink from the last discharge of his rifle.

"'A think 'a pipped him that time, miss," he said.

The girls opened their little mouths together at the observation, and lifted together the slender arch of their brows, but they made no reply to it.

The figures in khaki crawled on along the lawn out of their sight, beyond the corner of the house, but those three white blossoms stood there, making no move to follow, as though they grew against the wall. Only the whole cluster still shivered at each rap of the rifle, or when a bullet tore a tiny trench across the lawn.

That is a side of war from which the scene-painter does not often view it; its comic aspect became apparent later in the town.

Going down Commissioner Street, which cuts straight across Johannesburg's six square miles, we were somewhat surprised by the interest we excited.

People stopped on the pavement, stared, chattered, and pointed us out to others.

One could attribute their curiosity to an interest in newcomers, only we were ignorant at the moment how very new we were.

Further on one was fanned by an air of more unusual movement.

Out of by-streets, with a scurry of hoofs, rifles and bandoliers about their shoulders, riders would burst in unconcealed hurry and clatter on across the town.

Their haste, perhaps, prevented too close a scrutiny, but as they passed they cast upon us the gleam of an astonished eye.

Some that came on us most suddenly would swerve from their course and lay a hand on their rifles, but as we went slowly and made no show of valour they left the problem of our appearance to those who had spare time to solve it.

All the while firing went on along the hill, and

now and again a stray shot rang from an adjoining street.

Trade was clearly at a standstill; most of the shop-fronts were boarded; there showed in every face a quaint mixture of curiosity, excitement, and alarm. The whole city seemed on tremulous tiptoe.

Since no one offered the customary tribute of a drink we rode on to the New Club, which was closed, and thence to the Rand. There, by order of the commandant, all intoxicants had been consigned to the cellar, so we were forced to be content with tea.

While we were drinking it men would enter the room by twos and threes, gaze at us round the doorway, and disappear,

One began to feel like the latest acquisition in a menagerie, and were sensible that the curiosity of Johannesburg was being a trifle overdone.

We learnt news of this man and that, rode a little further in search of damage about the city, and stopped finally at Heath's Hotel, which was become the headquarters of the special police, a body of Johannesburg Uitlanders enrolled to protect private property and preserve civil peace.

There a man was found hospitable enough to bid us welcome with the usual formalities of the country; and, while toasting the change of rulers in an upper room, the door was roughly opened, and Denton, the head of the detective police, marched in, followed by a couple of even more evil-looking ruffians, who dumped the butts of their carbines on the floor, and stood to attention on either side of us.

We were asked our business, and, explanation not

proving satisfactory, were told that, as the city had not surrendered, we had no business to be in it—which was very true—and must consider ourselves prisoners of war, and would oblige by accompanying our captors to the charge office on our way to the fort.

Those acquainted with the detective police in Johannesburg have no desire to accept its protection.

Pretoria suddenly ceased to sound attractive, prison took a stony meaning, and we signified in our best Adelphi manner a preference for death ; or rather, to be strictly truthful, Mr. Buxton insisted splendidly on being slain, and his companion agreed without enthusiasm to the suggestion.

It was fortunately just the day for melodrama. No one knew to whom on the morrow he would have to look for mercy ; even while we parleyed the guns spoke of change. Denton and his fellows were not in a mood for extremities, and found our conduct inconsiderate. The chief officer explained the urbanity that was expected in a prisoner of war, but we would have nothing to do with the designation ; and Buxton continued to call for death, as though it figured in the wine list of the hotel.

At this pass Herr Brakhan, a captain of the special police, compromised the situation by an offer to undertake our custody for the next twenty-four hours on receiving our parole. Denton demurred, but the presence of other officers of the police, who supported Brakhan's suggestion, forced him in the end to acquiesce. The ruffians in mufti shouldered their carbines, and we were left in the keeping of a

gaoler, who proved himself a very cultured gentleman and most considerate host.

As the shooting continued and our troops failed to appear, our guardians showed some apprehension that an attempt might still be made to get us out of the town. We were kept out of sight at Heath's during the afternoon, and when darkness fell were conducted, disguised as special policemen, to Mr. Brakhan's house in Doornfontein, and were meddled with no more.

It was altogether a most amusing experience, and, more than that, significant in its disclosures of men's minds in time of stress.

The situation went like wine to the head, altering each, but with his special difference in effect. The tension told everywhere, but from some it rang laughter, from others oaths. All individuality was intensified, or rather the habit of pretences grew so transparent that the man himself became visible beneath it. And nothing in the world can compare with the interest of that disclosure.

Of the special police it is not possible to give a disinterested opinion. We came too near its operations to take a large view of its equity, and can only speak of its effects. It kept a city of villainous and deserved reputation quiet and uninjured in time of war.

That ought to prove sufficient epitaph, for that was its immediate business. It is not for those who lent no aid to such successes to question the method by which they were attained.

Incidentally also it secured our horses at a time

when private property in horseflesh can scarcely be said to have had a recognised existence—a very grateful service.

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The terms on which Johannesburg was surrendered covered the escape during the day of grace of the enemy's forces within the city.

Those forces were not considerable, certainly well under a thousand, but Lord Kitchener was gravely displeased with such an interpretation of the agreement, which, permitting this withdrawal, savoured to him of bad faith.

However, the peaceable surrender which Commandant Krause promised could only have been achieved in the absence of the firebrands tearing about the city anxious for a safe shot at anything in khaki.

Krause could not have yielded these, even had he so desired, and had we wanted them we should have secured every approach to the city before summoning it to surrender, and have taken the chances of street fighting.

The entry of the troops into Johannesburg was of no account as a spectacle, the street in front of the Government buildings being very narrow, and the arrangements for controlling the crowd extremely defective.

Doubtless no spectacle was intended ; it was merely the passage of an army's column from one camp to another. But the passing was before the chief who had led it in victory for six hundred miles, and under a flag which had not flown there above an Englishman

for close on twenty years. The crowd which gathered to see it pass, that cheered as if anxious to burst its lungs, that wore with conspicuous effrontery our country's colours, had the most venial average of visage it would be possible to conceive. Everything base seemed there and nothing noble; and, like a stain beneath the skin of almost every other, the greed of gain.

In contrast to that, one most pathetic incident may be mentioned on the evening of our entry.

In the middle of the roadway, close to the main street of the town, four old men knelt together calling on God to pardon the sins of their people and to restore to them the land which had fallen to the stranger.

One, with a reverend white beard, more moved even than the rest, leant on his fellow's shoulder and sobbed with heartbroken tears.

There was no jeering voice to urge that the God to whom they cried might be talking, or pursuing, or perchance asleep; but it seemed sad indeed that men in whom there is such real faith remaining had not learnt in place of their corruption, their cruelty, and defiant pride, to 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.'

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The army camped about Johannesburg for two days only, Lord Roberts occupying a little wayside inn at Orange Grove, three miles beyond it.

If his avoidance of the palaces of millionaires had other than a military reason, the avoidance was picturesque, but it must have been abominably dusty.

On Sunday, June 3rd, the advance recommenced, and we camped that night at Jokeskai River, expecting a battle on the morrow, but hardly hoping that the Boer would muster up pluck sufficient to defend Pretoria.

He could not, as it proved; and the action we were forced to fight in front of the capital was a mere salve to his vanity, without conceivable military purpose, a wilful and stupid waste of life.

The fight began shortly after eight, Colonel Henry's scouts discovering a gun in position on a steep kopje to the north of Ses Myl Spruit, the last trickle of water south of Pretoria. The Boers were clearly merely keeping us in touch, for they fell back at the first scent of our shells, and occupied a ridge a mile nearer the city, which was later to become the centre of Lord Roberts's position.

Thence they fired again, as the Mounted Infantry advanced, but were content to give us a very awkward ten minutes in the open, and cleared as our attack developed.

This position, of which we took possession as they abandoned it, and held till the following morning, can be roughly explained.

Open the first and second fingers of the left hand as wide as they will go, the second lying east and west.

The first finger will then represent this ridge, and the more the tip of it is bent toward the second finger the better.

The nek over which the road runs will be at the knuckle of its first joint, with the steepest and

highest part of the ridge to the left of the knuckle, and Pretoria will lie just beyond the nail of the second finger.

That finger dominates the first along its entire length, but chiefly at the point where the two join. It remained all day in the enemy's possession.

Our earliest approach to the nek came under fairly heavy fire, but the enemy's shells fell on either side of the road, and the guns got into position on the right of it without loss, two companies of Mounted Infantry clambering up the steep stony ridge to the left.

Its crest was covered with scattered blocks of quartz, as though the sugar-bowl of the gods had been emptied over it; some square and white, like loaf sugar, others smashed to fragments as though they had been hurled down from heaven.

Their glistening angles along the crest seemed to promise most excellent cover, but, arrived there, one discovered that it was commanded by the ridge beyond.

Peering over the edge one found the ground in front to be a dark wide valley leading towards Pretoria, with rounded hills at the further end, crowned with red forts, and closed to the north by the last roll of the Schurveberg, which rose on the left to its highest point above us in a purple front of stone.

Since that roll of hill met the ridge we had taken two miles to our left, that is to say, where the first and second fingers join the palm, it had a flanking as well as a frontal command of our position.

Nowhere along it was complete cover to be had, for the Boers, both in front and on the flank, were somewhat above us.

Their bullets made a greater variety of sound than I have ever heard before ; probably from alterations in their flight and shape among the many rocky edges of the ridge. There was the clear sweet silken whistle of the bullet that went clean over, the horrible purr of the tail-over-tip ricochet, the bee-buzz of the tail-twisters, the quaint sneer of those that had lost their noses, and the serpent hiss of others that were burst against the reef into a spray of lead.

Some were split and some were scored by the fangs of stone, and each took from the change a note of its own and sang it overhead.

The Boers honoured our arrival by a determined effort to dislodge us, and the ridge was for some time a far from pleasant place.

Since its height commanded for some miles the line of Lord Roberts's advance we could see how far distant was the prospect of reinforcement.

The men took cover along the edge and opened fire, but with little likelihood of success, on their unseen enemy.

The fire on both sides settled finally into a steady fusillade, during which, owing perhaps to the attractions of the camp-fire the night before, combined with a very early start, and aided, it may be, by the somnolent sound of the bullets, I fell inexcusably asleep.

The sharp bark from a pair of galloping Colts,

driven pluckily right up to our position, awakened me, and I found that the Mounted Infantry, which had lain beneath the battery on our right, were sweeping round behind us to get at the second-finger ridge by the back of the hand. They tried to make several short cuts, but the Mausers forced them on each occasion to make a wider sweep, leaving several of their men to mark the way they should not have gone.

Meanwhile the presence of the Colts brought a rapid crescendo into the song of the bullets about us, and we were by no means sorry when they moved further to our left.

The army at last began to come in sight, trailing slowly down to the river which was hidden from us, and reappearing as a moving brownness along the nearer roll of ground.

We lost sight of its front again under the eminence on which we lay, and were ignorant how far it had advanced until the cow-guns came into action on the nek beneath us, while on our left two batteries of the Seventh Division searched the crest of the hill which had pestered us for so long.

Their shooting was excellent, and a brown cloud of dust hung where the bullets tore the ground beyond the white bursts of the shells.

But the Mausers must have been elsewhere, for the lead still whistled and sang about our heads.

Whence we were lying it was difficult to see what was happening to the right or immediately behind us. We could hear the enemy's shells coming over the nek, and learnt later that, after a vain attempt to

silence the cow-guns, they upset the equanimity of the ambulance half a mile to the rear.

In front we could see the green explosions of the four-point-sevens, sometimes in the red fort on the nearest hill, sometimes along the slopes at the end of the valley, when a short shot at the railway station burst in view ; but nowhere could we see any sign of an enemy.

Then an order withdrew the Mounted Infantry from the ridge they had been holding for three hours, and as the Welsh crawled up beside us to fill its place we knew our responsibilities had at last been taken over by the main body.

The Welsh only stayed the briefest while, however, and the directions for their retirement, detailing the battalion's position in the brigade, hinted at an immediate advance on Pretoria, a field battery being dragged up to a platform just behind the ridge to take its place.

The guns at once drew the enemy's increased attention, the bullets against the rocks making an almost continuous soft chatter, and pencilling, here and there, on either side of one, gray streaks along the stone.

The position of the guns gave them a certain amount of cover, but one could only watch their practice by standing close to the edge of the ridge. While following a shot through my glasses, a bullet struck the cigarette case in my breast pocket, passing under and out at the back of my coat, and clean through the horse behind me.

It was the fourth out of the Boers had scored on

me in as many months—a score which would make even the meekest of non-combatants wish for a shot in return—but it was a bull for Peter.

I heard the unmistakable thud which a heavy bullet makes on horseflesh ; but the poor beast stood without moving for more than a minute, though the bullet must have gone through both his lungs. Then suddenly he flung up his head, staggered wildly like a drunken man, and fell over on his side, pawing the air convulsively ; and died two minutes after he was struck.

Poor Peter ! He had been through every fight of our four months' campaign, and had galloped with news many more miles than were good for him when the fights were over. He had learnt most of the philosophy which soldiering teaches ; learnt to like ration biscuit, and to lick his lips when he was thirsty. In the hard days before Paardeberg we had shared many a meal that was none too large for one, and slept together, hungry and uncovered, on the veld.

Only by such companionship does one come to know a horse. Not his paces and his vices and his powers, but his interests, his understandings, his capacity for self-effacement.

And only having thus learnt does one realise how much is gone when one loses him.

The horse with which one has lived happily for long hours, day after day, on lone and dreary marches, is bound up, unawares, with all the dreaming sympathies which such days breed. He is an unaccounted confidant ; his spirit and courage have

lifted the flight of reflections, and in the rhythm of his paces our vague thoughts have trod.

One learns from the parting how close has been the comradeship, and feels, too, on such an occasion, a sharp reproach for having brought and kept in a place of danger one innocent of all share in the quarrel from which came his end.

Curiously enough, though Peter could stand artillery fire, and was only moderately disturbed by the shock of a shell, he always shivered at, and sometimes would not endure, the whistle of a bullet.

He was hit in our first fight, and, breaking his tether, had cleared out of range; and it made an added bitterness to remember that it was the confiding trust he had acquired which cost him his life.

To any one in search of melancholy moments might be commended that in which one carries out of action the equipment of a fallen horse.

Turning from the ridge, my back to the enemy and face towards the long line of halted transport, with the empty saddle on my head and my hands full of rein and reins, headstall and bridle, feeling very hot and out of heart, a stray bullet rang against the stirrup which swung beside me.

It proved how far even our sense of humour varies with the fashion in which Fate treats us that the clink of the nickel against the steel made me more unreasonably angry than any other incident of the campaign.

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The fight continued till nightfall without further change, the Guards Brigade moving on towards

Pretoria under the hill on the right, with the Eighteenth behind them.

They held its crest during the night, headquarters falling back to Ses Myl Spruit, its last bivouac.

There the news reached us that Pretoria had surrendered, and that the Boers' boastful city lay at our feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

PRETORIA

June 15th.

SURELY never did a capital in falling so belie its boasts of war.

Already had been pictured for us the long weeks of siege, the last splendid struggle of a people whom no force of arms, no weight of numbers, only the lean thews of famine could defeat.

Here, in the rock-bound rolls of its mountains, where forts were bound defiant like crowns of red gold about the brows of its hills ; here, where for years it had prepared to meet us, we should see the last great fight of a free people brought to bay.

Beside that, Kimberley and Mafeking would fade from remembrance, and the defence of Ladysmith cease to be admired.

Well indeed they might, for here was supposed to have been spoken the last word in the art of war. The forts had cost one knows not what, their armament was the deadliest that science could devise, the hills that carried them might have been moulded by an engineer.

Ammunition had been accumulated for the most protracted defences, provision stored for an historic siege.

So the boast went, and what more was needed to fulfil it but the stout heart of a people?

A belief in that brought in our train, behind the long sea guns and the siege 'fives' and 'sixes,' the fat dumpy foreign howitzers, with mouths that gape over nine inches, and leaden waggon loads of 'armour-piercing, deferred-explosion' shells.

These were our tribute to the pretences of a nation, but they have worn their painted coats to no purpose, and have come their weary seven thousand miles almost in vain.

The defence of Pretoria delayed us one short afternoon. Before dark had fallen on the houses for which his life blood was to have been shed, the Boer was on the wing.

Small blame to him for flying—flight is his game. But why the boast of a defence which no one had the heart for? Why the forts for a defence when no one meant to fight? They stand there, for all their fine placing, ill-planned and ill-built monuments either to the Boer's astuteness or to his infinite capacity for being taken in.

We had watched anxiously on that Tuesday afternoon, when above Schanzkop our first shell burst. Would there be an answering spout of fire, despite the rumours that its guns were gone?

No sounds would have been then so welcome as the bang of a Creusot and the panting quiver of a great shell.

Instead there was only the scything sweetness of the bullets overhead, or their dull patter against the stones before us.

And, next morning, an abandoned town: a dull march on it through suffocating dust; a wait, the cleared square; and then, triumphal entry; the ceremony of the flag; a salute of cheers as it was lifted; God save the Queen!

In mere area the square of Pretoria is big enough. It is bordered by a curious medley of buildings, from tin-roofed shanties a few feet high to many-storied halls of justice and of government, which spoilt the spending of half a million pounds.

In its centre is the Dopper Church, a dull featureless affair, copied apparently from the illustrations in a child's box of bricks, and the unfinished pedestal for a statue.

Alike in its squalor and its pretentiousness, the place is damned with the dregs of style. It is daubed with the decaying decoration of the Greek and the Goth, and plastered with every fatuity of a false Renaissance.

One has but to look round those four sides to recognise that the people who built thus, in its humility and in its pride, could never be a nation.

Not a shape in all that stupid frontage has been moulded by the breath of a coherent spirit. Need and greed have made it—a nation never! For there is here no hint of a nation's identity, not a memory even of the lands from which its people have come; no sober homeliness from the Low Countries, nor a touch of fantasy from old France. It is the work

of a people who possessed nothing but the money to buy other men's ideas, and only the wit to buy the worst.

North, east, south, and west, streets enter the square; and with the church behind him, facing the little silken flag which had been wrought for the halliards of Pretoria, Lord Roberts watched two divisions of his army march across the town, half east from the westward, and half eastward from the west.

It was no polished spectacle, but a review in war order, robbed of its showiest features, for the cavalry were elsewhere.

But it was, probably, to those who had no knowledge of an ordered army, sufficiently impressive; for it lasted, with the best of management and few delays, a full two hours.

Two battalions of Grenadiers kept clear the square; about them was a dark fringe of townsfolk, and windows and balconies were crowded with people.

The cheering! well, the cheering was the sycophantish abomination that cheering is on such occasions, leavened with a loyal and exulting welcome from a score of throats.

Those voices, indeed, must never be forgotten, from the handful of men who for eight long months, despite inconceivable calumny, believed in their land, and looked forward undismayed to her day of victory.

Small wonder that they shouted their voices out when her hour was come, and had only a whisper left with which to speak at evening.

And the pale-faced cluster of prisoners, who leapt with welcome at the first of us to enter in khaki, the men who knew one and the men who did not, with a hot grip of the hand and the laughter of tense nerves suddenly relaxed. It was to them, in their pallor and thinness and pleasure, that one's heart went out, and they who asked the eager questions as each corps went by, all disguised in the common colour, and so many strange to their prison eyes.

And to each answer that told of splendid deeds, already dimly heard of, fresh cheers rang out, cheers none of which sounded louder than for the City Imperial Volunteers.

No better leveller lot of men marched past that day than the C.I.V. We who had come with the central column, and so saw them for the first time, were astonished by their bearing.

Hard and lean as old soldiers, they moved still with the resilient swing of the Volunteer.

Two months of the march and the field had made them the finest type of the soldier, and the man who has led and the city that bred them may well feel proud of the men they are.

One has had in this war almost one's fill of entries—Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, Johannesburg, and Pretoria. And this last lacked, what each has lacked, and what each most needed—the note of victory.

There has been everywhere the same anomalous spectacle—the peaceful city, the change of flags, the cheering populace, the procession of soldiers, the onslaught on the shops.

Save for a certain greasy discoloration and lack of gilding, the proceedings might have seemed to herald rather a mayoral change than one of Monarchy.

There was no ruin of streets, no cringing people, no *débris* of an army, none of the very needful adjuncts of successful war.

How needful, our present position goes to prove. For here we sit, an undefeated force with an enemy lying crouched as a panther to the east of us, and an enemy clinging like a vampire to our rear, yet able for the moment to strike at neither, and watching, while we sit impotent, the gray menace of famine take shape across our severed lines.

No, war must be made in the old ways, as we are beginning slowly to discover. Now we threaten with burning the nearest farms to the broken railway. What edict could be more unjust? and yet no edict is more needed.

The mistake is to talk of civilised warfare. There is nothing civilised in warfare, and never can be; it is a barbarian's game.

You may respect conventions and cosset the wounded, but these are but opiates to the conscience of men who have outgrown the means they still employ for settling a dispute.

Death and destruction are at the bottom of war, smoking hamlets and deserted homes. The rules that may be made in amelioration can never amount to much.

The country over which the enemy's operations have to be prevented must be reaped with an unsparing hand and a scythe of fire. There is no other way.

Policies of conciliation are excellent in their day, but their day is only when war is ended, and till then they are paid for in the blood of the men who have to see them through.

Let war be what it must be: blind and terrible, driven without pity to its speediest end.

Then let mercy temper justice in what measure you will.

Meanwhile, from the very quality of its defects, there is a world of comedy in our current fashion of making war.

You have a little fight, just enough to satisfy the conventions; a few men are killed, which is deplorable, of course, but such accidents in war cannot, as is well known, be avoided.

You go to sleep with the sound of the guns in your ears, you wake up to the 'British Grenadiers' or 'A Life on the Ocean Wave,' to find the Guards or the cow-guns going joyously past your bivouac. The sun shines, you trot on into the town.

Flags are flying, the standards of every nation, dusty and wind-worn, mingled with many British ensigns eloquently new.

The townsfolk are effusive, the girls are in their daintiest frocks. You wear your conquering air, and are coldly indifferent to the interest you inspire.

On the next day, or perhaps the day after, you are singing duets—'Friendship' seems a favourite in Pretoria—or playing tennis with the wives and daughters of the men you have been trying so hard to kill. You break off a prelude, it may be, or defer your service, to watch the guns go by to a battle in

which on the morrow you or your absent host may be killed.

It is all very pretty and friendly and amusing: but—is it war?

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We have been for the past fortnight almost as completely severed from news of the outer world as though we were a beleaguered city. Occasional fragments are delivered of our letters which De Wet has strewn about the veld. Our runners are captured before they arrive at Kroonstad, or find on reaching it that the line is cut still further south, and that they must push on to Bloemfontein, two hundred and ninety miles from us, to send a wire. If, by chance, they escape the enemy, it is very probable they will, despite their passes, be captured and confined as dangerous persons by our own people in Johannesburg or at the Vaal.

Consequently we despatch almost as little news as we receive, for six hundred miles is a long way to send a messenger, even without the chances of mishap on the road; and men who can be trusted over the journey are not innumerable.

For three days last week a battle was going forward about twenty miles east of Pretoria on either side the stony ridge of the Megaliesberg.

Its object was with twenty thousand men to enclose five thousand; but nothing came of the enclosure.

The ill-luck which has pursued Lord Roberts's column since leaving Bloemfontein still stuck to it; and we spent three dreary days doing nothing, within

sound of a most interesting action proceeding on either flank, Ian Hamilton bearing once more the brunt of the fighting.

It was an effort costly in good lives, and it instanced once again the futility of the cavalry's 'white' weapon, and the absurdity of attempting to fight effectively on a beast of burden.

The horses were, when called on for a charge, too tired to bring their riders within striking distance, and our losses occurred chiefly when they turned to retire.

The condition of our cavalry is really too pitiable to be believed. Many regiments are reduced to the strength of a decent squadron. The 'Tins' can muster only fifty horses, and the men whose martial splendour delights the nursemaids of London are reduced to working like navvies on the railway.

Big men in warfare have had their day. It was a very good day while it lasted, and it lasted long. But every needless inch now is a drawback to the foot, and every needless ounce to the horse soldier.

Consistent with a sound physique, the man most needed is one who offers the smallest front to fire, who can take cover with the greatest facility, who will be least burdensome to a horse. It is as ridiculous to-day to choose a soldier, as it would be to select a jockey, for his stature.

This is a day of small things in war; of compression in food and fuel and forage, and—humanity.

The more man you get in the smallest space the better for your purpose. Sound blood and bone and

muscle closely knit and finely tensioned is what is needed in a soldier.

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We had on the Feast of the Trinity, our first Sunday here, a thanksgiving service in the Cathedral of Pretoria.

Cathedral is, in the present instance, a very big word for a very small building, which would no more than supply the needs of an English village.

Still, the very smallness of its crowded space added impressiveness to the sound of the strenuous voices that filled nave and choir. For all the service was in the hands of soldiers, and the congregation was almost wholly in khaki.

Since we have been a world of men for so many months, on the march, in camp, and on the field, it was fitting that men should sing together and alone that hymn of victory and deliverance which is only heard in the days of battle, and that those men should make together the acknowledgment that time and fate have taught them—"We gat not this by our own sword, neither was it our own arm that helped us."

CHAPTER XXVII

ANTI-CLIMAX

PRETORIA, *June 20th.*

WE are, perhaps, not yet at an end of fighting, but settlement is already in the air: settlement and unsettlement.

It is painfully significant that while our armies are still in the field, while the enemy still refuses his submission, while even our threats breathe conciliation, that a political question should have arisen to confirm the doubts and embitter the suspicions of those we would control.

Six months ago, in Simon's Bay, one of the earliest prisoners of the war embodied for me the conviction which we have since met everywhere in our progress across the country.

"You English," he said, "believe you are fighting us to keep South Africa for yourselves. But you are not. You are fighting to keep Johannesburg for the Jew."

I told him that his fears were an exploded fable, and asked for proof.

The old keen face smiled. "You know little of

the Jew. He is so clever, he has given all you honest Englishmen a fine cause to fight about.

"But I will give you proof, and the proof will come. When we are beaten you will bring Pretoria to Johannesburg. Yes, the first thing of all. You will do it, and you will know not why it is done."

There the words stand as they were written five months back, and strangely enough the prophecy has come into the air for fulfilment, the "first thing of all" after our occupation.

The significance of the story any fool can see. The man who spoke was expressing something better than the popular belief, for he at least trusted our integrity, regarded us as tools; yet even he looked confidently forward to a change in the seat of government.

How, then, would such a change impress the people of both Republics, who have been convinced from the beginning that gold and aggression were our only motives?

Suppose, however, that Johannesburg as a rock of offence did not exist. Surely no more ill-judged affront can be conceived for a conquered people than, in the very hour of conquest, to change its capital.

It is an affront to every sentiment of a people's self-esteem: for the city of its pride is to a nation what the home of his fathers is to a man.

We, whose chief city is already a county, can hardly appreciate such a sentiment, but to peoples of more recent growth it has almost the compelling value of a faith.

All their thoughts have taken colour and their

hopes a shape from the hills and houses of their chosen city ; there should culminate their plans for greatness, or there be crowned their dreams of love.

Nor does this feeling exist only where one would expect to find it.

To the imaginings of the rural mind there is a sanction and a splendour even in the shadows of the Metropolis ; its very corruption has a glamour, an unknown air of mystery and power.

"Mere sentiment," says the Johannesburg objector. Sentiment most certainly, but he is a fool who would try to rule without it.

And sentiment, strangely enough, is a power with this most unromantic people.

Look at the liberty of which they boasted, and for which they have fought. It was a sentiment merely, the magnetism of a pretty name. Liberty was the thing chiefly that they went without.

"I do not like you," said the one good-looking girl in the crowd at Johannesburg, patting the horse of a trooper who kept the way, "you 'ave come to take away my country."

"Bless you, miss," was the prompt reply, "we've come to give it yer."

That was the staid truth, but she shook her head : they all shake their heads.

They have been fed on sentiment, Uncle Kruger, as high priest and patriot, mixing the pap ; and the man who tries to rule them by mere logic will make a most conspicuous failure.

But there is logic also in retaining the capital where it stands to-day.

A transference of the seat of government to the seat of trade would but render more unwieldy a township already sufficiently extended, and would tend to centralise the energies of the country in a position by no means central, and patently unfavourable to development in the northern areas of the State.

The Transvaal is especially a land where the rural as opposed to the rural tendency is to be deprecated, and everything possible done to counterbalance the magnetic force of a great city.

To focus the wealth and power of the State in one spot would result in the reduction of the dorps in its southern area to shrinking satellites, whereas by keeping their centres thirty miles apart a very large tract of country is put under contribution to supply their needs and to support those whose interests lie in either or in both.

As to the personal inconvenience of such an arrangement, that from a public standpoint is not always to be deplored.

Pretoria is sufficiently near Johannesburg for those who deal in mines to dabble in Government, and Johannesburg not so far from Pretoria but those of Government dealings may dabble in mines. Greater facilities are not to be desired.

Then in Pretoria exists already the State machinery, representing an expenditure of close on a million pounds, and the greater part of its municipal resources is under Government control. It has a water supply inferior to no town in Africa, has considerable military resources, and could be held by a small garrison for months against assault.

Its barracks are superior to anything we have in England, its forts could very easily be made impregnable; as a military station it could scarcely be improved.

In Johannesburg there is one fort, of no tactical value; and no town of more evil menace to the troops within it can easily be conceived.

These are but the first arguments against a change already talked about, but much still remains to be told.

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Lord Kitchener and his staff have just returned from their interesting trip to restore communication along the interrupted line.

The staff of the chief of the staff is unlike any other that we have out here. It has shared a good deal of experience, is decorated mostly with the same ribbons, and is composed of men who for some years have had no other business but war. It has acquired in consequence an alertness of movement and a picturesque simplicity of speech.

Told in its sub-official tongue, this expedition south might impress one rather as a sporting tour than as part of a campaign.

It described the capture of the Derbyshire Militia with the apathy of habituation to the loss of battalions.

The Rhenoster position has already been described. The Derbies utilised its strength by pitching their camp where the northern plateau breaks on the plain, leaving an inadequate picket to guard the heights.

The selection was the more extraordinary since better water was to be had on the high ground than on the low.

De Wet appreciated the situation—"saw he'd got a sitter," was the sub-official comment—culled the picket up on the hill as a man plucks a handful of daisies, and fired over its brow into the dazed camp beneath.

A more horrible position cannot well be imagined. In rear a plain, flat as a pavement for a thousand yards; in front the steep hilltop suddenly crowned with the fire of an unknown force. Truly, to borrow again the sub-official language, "our chaps want to be shot at three days a week to keep them in anything like form."

So the Derbies were wiped out, and the Rhenoster deviation was destroyed.

In his camp on the hills—not under them—Lord Kitchener found De Wet as he moved south with Lord Methuen's forces. But De Wet is no swash-buckler who cannot keep his feet out of a fight, and seeing that there was little advantage in fighting a force three times his own, fell back by a drift to the south-west lower down the stream, and Kitchener, after an action of six hours, pushed on to Kroonstad.

Having made sure of our security as far south as the Valsch, he returned north, camping on his way at Koppies Station, about a mile north of the Rhenoster position—now in charge of the Shropshires, some 600 details, 400 Yeomanry, and a Field Battery—and some 2,000 yards south of the con-

struction train, working in the white flare of a Wells light with its night gang on the line.

It was little before three next morning that a couple of the enemy, happily unconscious that the chief of the staff was within gunshot, rode up to the train, informed it that six hundred Boers, with four guns, were lying in wait across the veld, and summoned it, under penalty of immediate destruction to surrender. The Englishman has but one answer on such occasions, rather pithy than polite, and the Boer emissaries galloped back to their commando determined to make the train as hot a place as that to which they had been consigned.

In that, so far as fire was concerned, they succeeded admirably. The occupant of one of the carriages, the lower part of which was riddled by seventeen bullets, described the fire as so hot along the floor that he could not step down on it to pick up his boots.

Meanwhile, the firing had aroused the staff at Koppies Station with unpleasant suddenness from the dreams of long-deferred repose.

The dawn was still nearly three hours off, but the waning moon was high. Lord Kitchener started at once for Rhenoster, the Cape carts following with what speed they could.

Though the sentries round the camp by the river were too wrapt in a sense of security to trouble the incomers with a challenge, the Yeomanry with four guns turned out smartly and went forward to succour the train, the infantry following.

Day came, the enemy was falling back, and his

appearance had been satisfactorily explained as a part of De Wet's force—which, driven south-west by the previous action, was recrossing the railway, and finding quite accidentally the train at work, determined, in the sub-official tongue, "to mop up that little lot on its way"—when phlomp! dropped a shell at the foot of the kopje, fired from the south.

An attack from the line supposed to be securely in our possession was somewhat disconcerting. Two guns were ordered back, but they were useless at the range over which the Boers were tossing their 'monkey-drops' into the camp, and even the position of the enemy's artillery could not be located.

A small force, however, was turned out of a kopje some thousand yards to the westward, and the guns pelted the men as they broke cover and raced across the flat, their backs laid along their horses' necks, the reins in a bunch between their horses' ears, and with rifles beating a gallop from their extended flanks.

So the fight for the moment ended, but one knows not even now from hour to hour when it may not be renewed.

"It looks"—to quote finally the sub-official contemplative summing-up—"it looks as if De Wet thought he could shoot over the Rhenoster five days a week: but he'll find that we're getting pretty wild."

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We have met with so much soldierly treatment from the enemy in this war that one was surprised by the destruction of mail-bags by De Wet's commands.

One did not grudge any little luxuries the bags may

have contained, but the wanton destruction of long-awaited news was a most stupid and uncivil action, unworthy the reputation as a sportsman which De Wet has acquired.

The burning of all our winter clothing was, of course, a fair move in war, and it had a somewhat comic sequel.

Included in the general conflagration of effects were two wagon loads of 9in. shells. Projectiles of this size were a novelty to the Boer, and the consequences of their explosion were more novel still. There was a sudden and wild flight from the scene of the fire, fragments of the earth-shaking projectiles pursuing the fugitives in every direction, as shell after shell exploded with easy indifference to everything but the heat about them.

The watchers up and down the line listened with melancholy imagination to the long succession of reports, hearing in each at least the doom of a culvert, and foreseeing from each a weary length of fresh delay and an extended wait in their exposed position.

It was one of these little garrisons that fell at Roodeval after a splendid resistance on the morning when the Derbies were wiped out.

A laager had been made of mail-bags and bales of clothing, and, with but this frail protection to depend on, the officer commanding the post declined to accept the Boers' peremptory order to surrender. The enemy thereupon opened fire, on some preconcerted signal, and before the messengers had withdrawn, from a gun masked during the night within

four hundred yards of the station, putting nearly a score of the defenders out of action with its first discharge. The remainder fought on, however, compelling the guns to be withdrawn, till De Wet after his victory at Rhenoster brought up his artillery on four sides of them.

The defence of the line through the Orange State has produced, apparently, some very useful fighting, of which we have learnt only after the fitful and disjointed fashion in which all news has reached us for the past three weeks. The connected story still remains to be told.

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The cavalry have been somewhat ignorantly criticised for their failure in the action of the 11th and 12th to complete the enclosing movement which Lord Roberts had designed for the capture of Botha's force.

How uninformed that criticism is one gathers from the guess which estimates the force under General French at between three and four thousand strong. Towards the close of the war it is somewhat rash to calculate cavalry regiments on a paper footing.

In point of fact, the total strength of the Cavalry Division was not more than 600 : each brigade being about 300 and each regiment about 100, with a battery of four guns to each brigade, supported by some 600 Mounted Infantry under General Hutton.

The programme was for French to roll back the enemy's right flank on the Delagoa Bay Railway, while Hamilton drove in the right, Pole-Carew pushing through Pienaar's Poort in the centre when the circle was completed.

But the enemy saw through the plan, left a mere fringe of men to guard the main ridge of the Megaliesberg, and laid every rifle and gun available on his flanks.

French, making a wide detour through Derdepoort to the north, found the cross ridges at Kameelfontein strongly occupied by the enemy.

The first of these took roughly the shape of a crescent, bent to the northward from a spruit of Pienaar's River, with an isolated hill between its arms. The Boers were holding the northern half of the crescent, and French, sending Hutton to occupy its southern quarter, seized the hill with the 8th and 14th Hussars and 7th Dragoon Guards, O Battery supporting the seizure from the left flank.

Seeing that this kopje was commanded on two sides by the northern half of the crescent, at an average range of five hundred yards, as well as by the flanks of a higher ridge, also occupied by the Boers, behind it, the judgment which prompted its seizure might be called in question.

No praise, however, can be too high for the tenacity with which it was held, nor for the pluck with which O Battery supported its holders.

For fifty hours, on biscuit and water, from dawn to dark of succeeding days, exposed on two side to rifle and artillery fire at close range, what was left of the 4th Cavalry Brigade held on to the hill, while the 1st, after repelling a Boer attempt to outflank the little force from the northward, commenced on the 12th a flanking movement of its own.

O Battery on the open ground below the hill was a

special target for the enemy's attention, its position being sometimes hidden from those on the kopje in the dust lifted by the explosion of the 'pom-pom' shells.

If General French's estimate of the force opposed to him, 3,000 men and eight guns, be correct, it was more than equal to the task allotted it of holding our left wing in check. It might even have done more.

For on the morning of the 13th, when the enemy withdrew, the 4th Cavalry Brigade was almost at an end of its ammunition.

Since that last fight among the hills we have remained absolutely quiet in Pretoria. Troops have drained away to the south for a fresh conquest of the Free State, and if the enemy cannot be tempted to attack us in our present weakness, the day of his opportunity will soon be at an end.

Meanwhile we wait, and wait: wishing much to meet him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST DAY

EERSTE FABRIKEN, *Midsummer Day.*

THE air is cold and still and clear as a flawless crystal. So still that, sitting motionless here in the fading winter sunlight, its coldness cannot be felt. Yet, wave an arm, and it chills like water.

The long ridge of the Megaliesberg stretches westward from us past Pretoria, fifteen miles away, and on beyond, sinking down towards the horizon, an interminable distance, taking lovely purples upon it through the magic clearness of the evening air.

It looks like some vast and splendid surge of the primeval sea, as it sweeps to the southward hiding the sky with its ocean greenness, its crest hanging forward and curling darkly over—like a wave that falls—from the top of its six thousand feet, in a sheer scarp of stone.

There is another long but lower ridge of rock parallel to it three miles to the southward, with a lush valley between; then another level valley in which Pretoria lies, and further on a third great wave, which bursts into the broken water of the hills across which we came.

From Eerste Fabriken those three wonderful lines of surf, and the green troughs of the grassy sea between them, can be seen verging for forty miles towards the point of a far-off perspective.

We had ridden out in the early morning, our pace quickened by rumours that Botha was creeping up from the north-eastward, with six thousand men, and meant to fall unexpected upon Pole-Carew, who was lying, with his division, by the gap in the Megaliesberg, called Pienaar's Poort. Knowing something of the man in front of him, we conjectured that the unexpectedness might possibly be for Mr. Botha, since the soldier, whose swift and daring discernment might have turned one of the worst defeats of the war into a victory, was not likely to be caught asleep.

So indeed it proved ; for the Eleventh Division were shifting camp when we arrived, and its commander, delighted at the prospect of a little fighting, had already set his traps.

And so we waited alert, expectant, through that clear silent midwinter day.

Ten thousand men were somewhere a mile or two in front of us, but not a sound told where they lay. From the empty rolling leagues of the veld came no cry of any living thing : the dark pines about the house were not stirred by the hum of an insect or the note of a bird. And the crystal clearness of the air only made the silence seem more mystical and more profound.

Heavy headed red roses hung yet upon the trellis, roses still diamonded with the morning's dew. When a drop fell one could hear its soft thud upon the

ground, and the loss of its weight set the long bud nodding. In that motionless silence every vibration was caught by ear or eye, and caught the more clearly since our senses were alert for more conspicuous changes : for a white burst of smoke upon the crest of the Megaliesberg or the dull uproar of a shell.

It was a curious situation. Only a few days earlier we had been fighting there, the house had been in the hands of the Boers. They had threatened its owner with death if he fed the rooineks.

Now an English general sat on the stoep, perfectly turned out as ever, easy and debonair, laughing at the sallies of the queer aitchless aweless little man who had given us as good a lunch as could be had in London.

The house, which differs little in appearance from the typical well-to-do Dutch farm, is furnished with the last resource of luxury. It has its own waterworks and pumps its water from the finest spring among the hills. It makes its own light, which sets it aglow amid its dark trees at nightfall from a hundred fairy bubbles of glass. And upstairs an A.D.C. and the C.R.A. are playing billiards upon an excellent table.

The whole scene breathes of indolent peace, or would but for the occasional appearance of a mounted orderly before the porch, and the rattle of flying gravel behind man and horse as they return with their despatches.

But the silence falls across the tinkle of the scattered stones, all the deeper for its brief disturbance—a silence, not close nor heavy in which one

fears to speak, but the absolute limitless emptiness of the open air.

Nothing stirs within it of which the ear is conscious, nothing moves across it but the slow tapering shadows of the firs. The shadows stretch along the drive, and fall across the trellised roses, and the long red buds resign for another morn their hopes of opening.

Light-footed maids appear with tea upon the stoep, and the sound of voices gathers about it like the thickening hum of bees.

The talk and the laughter, the dreamy Sunday stillness, the dainty air of extravagance in the silver on the tray, suggest the summer quiet of a week-end in England. Instead it is midwinter, and England seven thousand miles away.

And so, without a note of war, the quiet mellow day goes down, and night comes with its quick cold grip and sudden sparkle of stars.

And with the day goes, too, the last hope of a fight about Pretoria.

The enemy has proved himself, as so often before, a creature of talk, a thing of pretences: with every hour now his chances fade. The war will drift drearily to the eastward, and others will see its end.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE REMAKING OF AN ARMY

BLOEMFONTEIN, *Easter Eve.*

WE have heard out here, with very little satisfaction, to how much in the minds of our legislators the lesson of South Africa amounts. It has been measured in men and guns and horses; measured rightly as far as sheer deficiency in such things goes. More guns and men and horses by all means; but we wish to learn, not how many more are needed, but how many more are to be had.

"You cannot," to use a favourite phrase of Mr. Cecil Rhodes's, "make men as you make trousers," and the Government proposals seem unlikely to produce anything but an army in cloth. Mr. Wyndham has spoken of permanent additions to the army. Now, addition is by itself an easy matter if there be anything to add, but, where the increase of an army is concerned, addition must be preceded by creation, and the creative forces on which Mr. Wyndham counts do not appeal to us in South Africa.

He seems to diagnose the temperament of that very dull-blooded and forgetful person, the British public, from the ravings of his war fever, and to argue the possibility of permanent additions in the future from the ease of impermanent ones to-day.

Perhaps in England at present such optimism is unavoidable. We read of men kicking their head-gear about the streets of London, but, joyously un-English as such rejoicing sounded, we could not imagine the same men sacrificing the price of a hat for the glory of the army in six months' time. It did not occur to us to build hopes for the future on their light-heartedness; we were outside the contagion.

The news of Ladysmith's relief was greeted at Osfontein with a sincere 'Good business' or a fervent 'Thank God.' Even Cronje's surrender, though a matter of life and death to many, moved no one to take off his helmet. Campaigning numbs the emotions; it is a long dull hungry business anyhow, and confines a man's speculation to the day's work.

Hence we view the new army proposals with a more nearly normal consciousness than, it seems, can be found to-day in England; and our wonder is that serious plans for the future should be founded on a passing enthusiasm. Fifteen battalions and forty-three batteries. It takes one's breath away! But who will find the men?

Those that get home from this business will not be ideal centres for recruiting. They will 'buck,' no doubt, about their doings, but they will tell also

how they toiled and starved and sickened. And they will probably not even have a medal with which to dazzle the village eye till time has robbed them of a tunic on which to wear it. No, they will not be of much assistance to the Queen's shilling; and the longer public favour is prolonged by this war the quicker will it fail when war is ended.

But the War Office scheme deals chiefly with deficiencies. It is efficiency for the most part that interests us out here. We have a Cavalry so overladen that it cannot pursue the enemy; a Mounted Infantry for scouting purposes that was never taught to scout; an Artillery that at the enemy's ranges is forced to remain silent; and battalions which have to learn their drill on the field of battle. We have a Medical Department with appliances cut down to a fraction of its peace footing, and we have a system of transport and supply for ever in the melting-pot of alteration.

No wonder it is efficiency which most concerns us.

CAVALRY.

On the subject of cavalry, what is there left to say? Everything possible has been urged against overlading, yet the overlading goes on. We have been robbed already of three victories, two of which might have proved momentous, from the inability of our wearied horses to move.

The cavalryman of to-day is an experimental anachronism. He clings to the 'white arm' of a

bygone age, and supplements it with a compromise for the modern rifle. He feeds on the belief that weight has still a place in warfare, and sacrifices his real advantage to an obsolete craving for shock tactics.

What has that craving cost him in this war? Twice or thrice, indeed, he has got home with lance or sword into a beaten enemy, but twenty or thirty times his regiments have been 'held up' by a handful of men with better weapons and fresher mounts. The man who watched the cavalry's impotence at Poplar Grove and Driefontein needs to hear nothing more of shock tactics. If a 'pom-pom' and a 15-pounder are to be considered the equivalents of a Cavalry Brigade, where, in the name of your 'white' weapon, does a Cavalry Brigade come in?

In this war, so far as the present writer has observed it, cavalry has been superior to infantry in but one particular—mobility.

Its two successes at Kimberley and Koedoes Rand were due to mobility, and from a lack of mobility proceeded its four most distinguished failures. At the present moment the entire progress of the campaign is suspended because the cavalry horses are absolutely worn out. And why? Because in the equipment of our cavalry we have been attempting the impossible. We have retained the arms and ideals of half a century ago, though magazine fire has removed the need for shock tactics and the range of modern field-service guns has rendered them almost impossible.

Against any but a flying enemy a cavalry charge would be a criminal blunder ; and the chances for it, when shell fire can keep a massed force uneasy three or four miles away, are extremely rare. Speed and endurance should be the cavalryman's endeavour in the future, and for these all minor advantages may be sacrificed. The load on the horse must be cut to its lowest limit, the lightest man must be put in the saddle, with a rifle only in his hands, and he must regard his mount as a means of transit and not as a mode of action.

This, it may be objected, would amount to revolution and the abolition of cavalry in the present meaning of the term. The meaning of every term changes, but the change would imply rather evolution than revolution. The equipment of the cavalryman has been conditioned since the earliest days of battle by that of the foot soldier. It was the bullet's penetration which thickened the knight's armour till no horse could carry it, and now it is the bullet's range which is to effect a further alteration in the methods of the man-at-arms.

"Times change, and we with them," said the philosopher. But unfortunately we don't. As a people we make a point of holding out against Time ; of being, amid his changes, the one thing unchanged. We call that conservatism, but it only conserves our ill-success.

For this war we are paying a big price, but, if only its teachings are heeded, we may reap a big profit, and lead the way in military development instead of lagging in its rear. The chances are, however, that

every other nation in Europe will make use before we do of this costly experience.

And in this matter be it remembered that the breakdown of our cavalry was the outcome of a march of no exceptional ardour. Very much the reverse. General French's Division took four days from Modder River to Kimberley, some eighty-five miles, doing in no day more than infantry can quite readily accomplish. It had not enough fighting to harass it, and no exceptional difficulty as to water; yet it arrived in Kimberley with close on a thousand horses unfit for further effort.

There were, it is true, other causes than overlading for this collapse. The horses had been ill-nourished for some time before leaving Modder River, and the cavalryman is not sufficiently instructed in sparing and cosseting his horse. To see the difference which may be wrought by a saner load and careful treatment one has only to turn to a body of irregular cavalry, such as Nesbit's Horse, where every man owns his own charger.

There, though the work done has been not only considerably more than that performed by the regular regiments—and done, moreover, at all sort of awkward and unexpected moments, as scouts, guides, and convoys—not a horse has been lost from overwork, and all are still in excellent condition.

A committee of some half-dozen cavalry officers sat at Bloemfontein to consider whether the weight which the cavalry horse is required to carry could be materially reduced. It decided that with existing means of transport the dead weight upon the horse

could not be brought below 116 lbs., made up as follows :—

	LBS.
Saddle (including wallets, various straps, breast-plate, sword-frog, bit, bridoon, and carbine bucket)	34
Sword and scabbard	4½
Carbine	7½
Numnah	3½
Horse-rug	4½
Blanket	4½
Water-bottle (full)	3½
Mess-tin	1½
Feeding-bag	1½
150 rounds of ammunition and bandolier	12
Cloak	5
Haversack, towel, soap, &c.... ..	3
Waterproof sheet	2½
Corn sack (1½ lb.) and shoe case (1 lb.)	2½
Two days' oats at 10 lbs. per day	20
Three days' rations, <i>i.e.</i> , 1 lb. tinned meat and ¾ lb. biscuits per diem with groceries	6

That is to say, every cavalry horse has to carry two riders of medium weight, for in addition to his compulsory kit the horse soldier is sure to accumulate at least an extra stone's weight of odds and ends.

Now it is clear that no horse with the weight of two men upon it will be of much use in any climate or under any conditions for rapid and continuous working; and the cavalry which reduces its horses' entire load to fifteen stone, which is quite possible with light riders, will have an immense advantage in the next campaign.

That cavalry, one may safely predict, will not be

England's: for not only are we the tardiest nation upon the earth to profit by our own experience, but our cavalry officers are notoriously averse from any alterations in equipment which may detract from their peace appearance; and the Roger Aschams of our day will doubtless continue to find pleas for the retention of obsolete weapons till every army in Europe has discarded them.

That there is nothing in the climate and conditions of South Africa specially prejudicial to horseflesh may be proved by a personal instance. I bought a horse on landing at Capetown: a very ordinary animal not more than equal to my weight. He had never a day's rest from the commencement of Lord Roberts's campaign until he was shot outside Pretoria. The saddle was on him every day, and I was in it occasionally for twenty hours.

He had, not infrequently, after following the cavalry movements all day, to canter fifteen to thirty miles back with the news of their doings when their work was over; and he certainly did on an average from three to five miles daily more than they. There was no special provision for his food, for, in spite of the printed promise of the War Office, we were seldom on the march permitted to draw forage, and he often had only a share of the biscuits destined for my own dinner.

Yet he had not a day's illness nor the trace of a sore back from start to finish, and he ended in better condition than he began.

But then he never carried two men's weight. A light mackintosh, a water-bottle, an aluminium

canteen, a nose-bag, and what of food the holsters held, was all he was asked to bear. One paid in discomfort for his light load when alone and forced to camp with what he carried ; but one gained by his efficiency, and from never having to ride a worn horse.

And with a load as light and the same care the cavalry horses could have done just as well, even though unable to utilise every shred of forage—often left from the feasts of more favoured horses—and chance of grazing which may fall to the unattached.

That, however, is a larger subject than we set out on. The points for cavalry in the future are—

1. The infantry weapon, and no other.
2. The lightest possible equipment.

Every kind of accoutrement not absolutely essential to the existence of man and horse to be carried either on pack animals or in some form of galloping field carriage to accompany the column. The change of weapon would of itself bring a change of tactics, and ensure that the cavalry ideal of the future should be to act as infantry in unexpected places.

MOUNTED INFANTRY.

Of our arms out here the Mounted Infantry has been the most and least deservedly abused. Undoubtedly it is everything that mounted foot should not be, and not much that it should ; but then, its very existence is almost a miracle.

It is arrived at by depriving a line battalion of its best men, and turning them from excellent infantry into indifferent horsemen. It is raised at haphazard, at a moment's notice, and entrusted with work which

demands not only years of training, but a natural aptitude: work the most important which it falls to a soldier to perform.

Of all the strange blunders which we make, perhaps the strangest is that a man can be 'told off' for scouting; but so long as the belief continues the army will undoubtedly be 'told off' for surprises.

It is as absurd to suppose that a scout can be made, by word of command, as an artilleryman. The artilleryman would, of the two, offer the easier task, for he need bring no inborn qualities to the transformation. The scout cannot be taught by maxims—unless you fire them at his head—nor by drills. Experience only is of value to him, and even to profit by that he must have the needful salt of suspicion, of observation, and of daring.

Therefore, you cannot cultivate scouts in times of peace or in ordered countries. They must be grown in our outmost territories, where a man's life lies always in his own keeping, and the pick must be swept from these at the first note of war, and placed in the front of the army.

We have one such at present: one to some 40,000 men; but others are on their way. Sam Steele and his Mounted Rifles ought, if properly handled, to lift the veil which has hung too often over the enemy's movements.

Our frontiers pass under every sky, and there should be men forthcoming from them, strangers to no soil nor clime, inured to the wiles of every savage race, to supply the eyes of an army.

In Canada such men exist, incorporated ; they should be embodied everywhere, and enrolled for service beyond the seas. But we will probably decline to pay the upkeep of such a corps in time of peace, and thus in war have to pay for the lack of it in blood and guns. For the night work, which only such men can do, cannot be taught in long or short courses—it must be lived. And for that work there is no substitute.

After that, a long way after, comes the scout as far as training can make him, which is still a long way ahead of the scout as he exists out here.

How should it not be ? The mounted infantryman is new to everything which he should know by heart. He still handles his horse as if it were a camel, with alternate vengeance and entreaty ; his arms are still an unsolved encumbrance, cover still something that rises above his head, and the skyline his favourite post of observation.

Considering the fashion in which he is pitchforked into his new duties, he is a marvel. Considered as a scout, he may be left uncounted. His method of informing himself of the enemy's position is characteristic of his courage and of his ignorance. He rides straight at it. If the enemy shoot, the scout concludes he is there : if he doesn't, the scout reports that he is not.

That the enemy is an animal whose toe has often to be trodden on to make him show his nose seldom occurs to this simple-minded observer. He judges from what he would expect of himself in like

cases. With the Boer, most commonly, he judges wrong.

If mounted infantry is going to be retained as an arm distinct from cavalry, it must be reorganised and taught its duties. In manœuvres, what mounted infantry there may be is generally lumped with the cavalry or sent as an escort to guns.

In war its most important duties are independent, so independent often that they are unknown to the men who perform them.

And since the cavalry detailed for a division has been found insufficient for its needs, and mounted infantry used to fill up the deficiency; let mounted infantry, if it is to have a separate existence, supply in adequate numbers the place of the divisional cavalry, and be taught protection duty.

For this the arm must be the rifle, not the carbine, as recently suggested. It is not that the mounted infantryman desires to come into action at 1,500 yards, but he dislikes being put out of action at that distance.

Pressure has sometimes to be put on the enemy to make him disclose his strength, and pressure cannot be put on any one who has all the shooting to himself for 1,000 yards. Hence the rifle. And let it be carried, not in a bucket, but slung in front on a horn, as in the broncho saddle. The use of the stock bucket means, when men are lolling, tired or even asleep, in the saddle, that two-thirds of the rider's weight is supported on the off side. Sore backs are the consequence, and with sore backs the way of the army has been blazed across the veld.

On the broncho saddle the rifle lies mostly across the horse, its weight is distributed and carried further forward. What has been said of the cavalryman's spare equipment applies with greater force to the younger arm. There must be nothing but necessity on the horse.

ARTILLERY.

Perhaps it is in artillery that the war has wrought most revolution of our ideas. The royal regiment never had a reputation for adaptability, but it required a nation of farmers to prove how slowly it had progressed.

From the faultless sufficiency of 12 and 15-pounders to what a medley we have come of pom-poms, Nordenfeldts, naval twelves, and 4.7's. No wonder that the gunner stands aghast, and asks what in Vickers' name he will be told next to handle.

But in artillery the last word of the war has not yet been spoken. We only know that great changes are to come, that the impossible of yesterday will be the custom of to-morrow, and that the slim trim batteries of to-day have seen the end of their supremacy.

The big guns are coming into the field ; coming in shape less clumsy than we see them wear to-day ; coming perhaps behind oil or steam ; coming to speak across spaces where the field gun grows in vain ; and coming to stay.

And with these, the little wicked wrangling snapping vixens, born at sea of the quick-firer and the Maxim, and bred to run on shore upon a pair of

wheels. They are coming, big gun and small, quick-firer and continuous, with the queer new shapes and the queer new noises, to stand against the slim trim batteries and do their work beside them.

The future lies in the hand of the quick-firer. "Two shells are better than one," says the new Maxim. And the saying is true.

Two shells of a pound apiece are better than one of two pounds—against troops. For it is the frequent pounding that loosens the heart in a man sooner than the one big blow.

But the big one must be there as well ; the blow that comes from below the sky, with all the dark terror about it of secrecy and appalling distance ; the thunderbolt with its slow deadly certitude, and that sheet of flaming shattering damnation spread out across the air.

Long range and rapid fire. The in-betweens can go.

CHAPTER XXX

THE REMAKING OF AN ARMY (*continued*)

BLOEMFONTEIN, *April 21st.*

THE remarks which were made under the above heading on the management of cavalry horses on the veld may have proved equally unacceptable to cavalry soldiers at home as here.

Hence an Army Order on the subject, issued a few days after they were written, and endorsing the criticism of that letter, may be worth quoting.

After alluding to a previous memorandum the order proceeds :—

“The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief fully recognises that, under certain circumstances, and when some important advantage can be gained by sustained rapidity of movement, the sacrifice of horses may become a military necessity. Contingencies of this nature have occurred during the recent operations, and have no doubt contributed in no small degree to the present condition of the mounted corps. On the other hand, there have been periods when the troops have halted, or only marched short distances, and on these occasions it is to be feared that due care

has not always been taken to feed the horses at short intervals, and to water them whenever the opportunity offered. Moreover, Lord Roberts has frequently observed that men remain mounted when there is no necessity for it, and on the line of march he has never yet seen the horses being led.

"Making every allowance for long and rapid marches, want of water, and deficient forage, Lord Roberts is of opinion that, if the horses, more particularly those of the cavalry and mounted infantry, had been better cared for, fewer of them would have become useless. The supply of remounts is not unlimited, besides which, fresh horses are not likely to be immediately forthcoming at the moment when they may be most urgently wanted. The success of military operations in this country largely depends on the mobility of the troops employed, and this ceases as soon as the horses fall into bad condition.

"The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief is confident that the officers to whom this order is addressed are as anxious as himself to maintain the efficiency of their respective corps, and he appeals to them to spare no trouble in looking after the feeding and watering of their horses, and to see that the men dismount and that the horses are allowed to graze on every possible opportunity.

"His lordship draws the special attention of general and commanding officers to this subject, which is of vital importance to the army in South Africa, and he holds them responsible that his instructions are clearly understood and strictly complied with by all those serving under them."

To that wise pronouncement one note might be added. When the last ounce is about to be demanded from a horse, an ounce extra should be put into him while still possible. The horses which left Modder River, and they composed the bulk of General French's command, left in no condition for a forced march on half rations.

Also, it might be well to indicate, if on the score of modesty alone, that the lessons spoken of as learnt in this campaign are of two kinds: those learnt, painfully learnt, by all men; and those laid to heart at present only by the few. The suggestions concerning the future armament and employment of cavalry are still anathema to the ordinary cavalry officer. Small wonder, since the dash and glitter of the squadron were what attracted him—the splendours of peace. To the grim utilities of war he only gives his worst attention.

INFANTRY.

Concerning infantry there is much to be said which may well wait for the saying.

In tactics especially our recent modifications are likely to be still further modified, for as yet no action can be claimed by us as a tactical success.

It is probable that in the future the pace of strategical manœuvres will be improved, but the set pieces taken at a much slower rate.

Advances will be precautiously deliberate, for the new trouble is not to get in but to get out of action.

The endeavour of a small force in a strong position will be not only to retard the enemy's successful

advance but to prevent his retreat ; and the offensive commander will have to fear, even more than a desperate resistance, a tenacity of restraint, and to find himself alike unable to press an assault or to extricate his men, till nightfall, from the enemy's fire.

At Klip Kraal some 300 Boers put an entire brigade practically out of action from 10 a.m. till dark by the simple expedient of permitting its approach within 500 yards before opening fire.

That is but one of many new features introduced by the accuracy and range of modern rifle fire, and one of the future objectives of a commander will be to 'tie up' his enemy in detail with the least cost to himself—a problem sure to develop opportunities for subtlety and *finesse*.

We are learning many things all wrong out here. Continued immunity from a counter attack—in fact, the enemy's complete lack of tactical initiative—has made us grievously careless of our reserves.

And the handling of a reserve is no easy matter when bullets are still painfully effective at 2,000 yards.

At Drieput, when the Twelfth Brigade was crossing the river under a heavy fire in almost perfect safety, there was a belt of bullets some 1,800 yards behind it, in which nothing could have lived, and another space, objectionably dusty, 500 yards further on.

It would have been impossible to move troops across either area without heavy loss, the ground affording no cover.

In open country the Drill Book method of massing reserves and deploying in the direct line of advance

must go, and, save in hilly country, support seems likely to take the form of a secondary attack.

The total failure of artillery to do what was predicted of it has introduced a hiatus in the handling of infantry.

The enemy was to be shaken with shell fire before a final advance should be attempted. But shell fire has not had so very shaking an effect.

After ten days pouring out the terrors of our artillery at Paardeberg, the Boers admitted that lyddite had an unpleasant smell, and that they were glad of their trenches while we were firing shrapnel. Of a shaking they showed no sign at all.

There were 120 guns to 4,000 Boers—a gun to every 33 Boers—a proportion not likely to be improved on in the future; yet it is doubtful if, in those ten days, the guns damaged one man apiece.

That can hardly be considered an effective preparation for an infantry attack.

The surprising utility of the Boers' trench work brings up the question of the spade. We have used it very little, but without it at Paardeberg we would have been almost powerless.

But digging under magazine fire is by no means an easy matter, and it is probable that, in the future, spade and shield must work together.

The shield is still in its infancy, and, like any other infant, is praised mostly by its own mother, and meets elsewhere with little favour.

That every man will carry a shield does not seem at present likely, not, at least, until the resistance and weight of steel bear an altered proportion. But

sufficient shields might be carried with each battalion to supply a company, by which entrenching operations could be begun, the first trench being dug behind the shields, and, when occupied, covering with its fire the digging of a second.

A shield seems also likely to come into use to enable reserve ammunition to be carried into the firing line. At present it may easily happen that a line may become isolated with exhausted pouches and no means of refilling them. Neither does it seem altogether incredible that mechanical means may be adopted for conveying ammunition across ground swept by fire.

With the extension of front now demanded, an extra sub-division of control has been found needful. An increase of company officers is hardly to be looked for, so that N.C.O.'s, and even privates, will have to be trained in new responsibilities, each group of five or six men having an acknowledged head.

The future is to the army whose individuality is most highly developed. That is the lesson of this campaign.

The Boer fights with his instinct, other soldiers with their memories.

Discipline destroys instinct, and effective training most achieve its re-creation.

The mould must be loosened when the drill-soldier is made, and the spirit of his fighting quality re-kindled.

But before troubling about that we must habituate him to the ordinary precautions of war. Habit alone

counts in an emergency. The presence of an enemy does not suddenly improve the soldier's thinking capacity twenty per cent., as we seem to expect: rather it flurries out of his mind every mental process which has not become sub-conscious.

The absurd unrealities of our manœuvres have much to answer for. If you permit men to stand in serried ranks, and fire at each other across 200 yards on Salisbury Plain, you have yourself to thank when men and officers blunder into a like situation in the day of battle.

Our present military objective is appearance on parade: that of the future must be utility in the field. We must teach our men not to look pretty, but to be effective; not to perform, but to fight. One is met, of course, in every step of reform by the nightmare of recruiting. One must not, forsooth, teach the soldier his business, because that business is an arduous one, and if its ardours are made too prominent there will be no men to teach.

If that, indeed, be the truth, the sooner we come to compulsory service the better.

But let not the plea of recruiting be any longer advanced to cover our futilities in training.

And while we have still to depend for our army on the fancy of a people, let us make a bid for that fancy by sensible means, and not by sacrificing the value of the thing we are making.

Instead of paring every shred of distinction and display from our uniforms, let us emphasise the individual note of each regiment, and make its full dress as attractive as possible to the eye.

Dress is the chief bait by which young men are caught, and if it be worth while to tie a fly with care to catch a salmon, surely it is so also to catch a man. And let the expense of this full dress be counter-balanced by a workmanlike material for drill and fatigue.

It is impossible to profit by observations at manœuvres, if men are wearing a colour visible three times as far off as that which covers them on a campaign. It is foolish and improvident to start men in clean new clothes on the dirty job of war, and entails an outlay which must make many an officer look forward to a campaign with very mixed feelings, since he must certainly pay for his kit but may never get a chance of doing anything in it.

Khaki is possibly not the best colour, and certainly cotton is the worst material. An open woollen mixture of buff and olive green would be more generally invisible and less likely to fade; and whether in hot or cold climates a porous wool is to be preferred to impervious cotton. It is at once cooler and warmer, and a better protection against violent extremes of temperature. But the sensible clothing of troops is too large a question to speak of here.

We are merely concerned with the appearance of the soldier in the field as a part of his home training, chiefly with reference to the need of accustoming him to the conditions of a campaign.

In this respect the regimental training of almost every Continental army, the Russian in particular, is infinitely superior to our own. In countries where

ample uncultivated ground remains, it is of course possible, in a way debarred from us, to throw the soldier on his own resources. But at least he may be taught the fundamental principles of caution and observation.

I spent a good many nights on the picket line, and the absolute ignorance and apathy of the outposts on whom the safety of the army depended was a circumstance to make one shudder.

Not only did they know nothing of their proper duties, but were ignorant that there was anything to be known.

When a picket had a position assigned to it, its first concern was invariably its own comfort. The ground it commanded, the approaches it overlooked, the cover it afforded were secondary considerations. It was ignorant, as a rule, of the enemy's supposed whereabouts, of the exact location of neighbouring pickets, even of its own proper front and of the points of the compass. It did not know to whom information was to be forwarded, or where the receiver of intelligence was to be found.

That is but a sample of the effect resulting from slipshod regimental and manœuvre training.

Such carelessness, one is told at home, is not credible, and our successes are pointed to in refutation. Our successes are due to the lack of military knowledge and common courage in the Boer. Had he been as good a soldier as he is a stalker, our method would have had to be very much amended before we reached Pretoria.

In some particulars it is no exaggeration to say

that the force under Lord Roberts was without discipline. One of the acutest critics with that army called it a mob. And a mob it was ; a mob moved by the spirit of cheerful and unflinching courage. Thanks to that courage, its battle discipline was magnificent. There was never need for that corps which the Germans' experience in 1870 taught them might be required to force skulkers into the line of fire. And thanks to Tommy's excellent good qualities the civil discipline of the army was a thing to wonder at : the marvellous restraint of thirsty and starving men in the presence of plenty which was not theirs, and the wonderful courtesy of those men always to the womenfolk along the way.

Yet in military discipline it was a mob ; a mob of the best and bravest fellows with whom a man may thank Heaven that his lot for a few months has been cast.

* * * * *

The Lee-Enfield is still on its trial, but complaints have been few. The weight of its ammunition is against it, and the fact of its being a single-loader.

The big magazine, which seems so much in its favour, is only a quality of its defects, for with a quintuple-loader no such reserve is needed. It is also an awkward gun to carry.

On the accuracy of its shooting a campaign can throw no light.

In range it is inferior to almost every rifle in use on the Continent, and its long-distance sighting is extremely clumsy. On these two points improvement is essential, and the calibre will probably

have to be reduced, though its stopping powers are not at present any too considerable, and the new Steyr seems to have carried the theory of reduction to excess.

The bayonet will probably be retained, if only for night work, but its present shape is pretty certain to be modified.

A hollow half-circular point of steel, some four inches long, fitted like the sheath of a leaf to its stem, and acting at need as a sight protector, would be amply sufficient for stabbing purposes, would not spoil the balance of the gun, and could be carried anywhere. The present weapon is equally troublesome on the belt and on the rifle.

But the bayonet leads one on to dangerous ground.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE REMAKING OF AN ARMY (*continued*)

A.V.D. AND A.P.D.

PRETORIA, *June 28th.*

ONE realises that our army was planned for almost any purpose but that of war, chiefly when considering the operation of its minor departments.

The parts fit together with deadly accuracy ; there is no elasticity, no allowance for expansion, for the contingencies of friction and rough usage.

It is a very elegant piece of mechanism, so long as you work it where it was made ; like a toy that runs beautifully on a smooth surface but comes to grief on the carpet.

Of the values and faults of these departments the Army Veterinary is typical.

Working without stress it runs prettily enough ; burdened with the weight of war it ceases as a coherent faculty to exist at all.

When one commences in one's impertinent manner to find fault, to suggest alteration, one's suggestions

are often quenched, quite apart from their futility, by the question of expense.

The changes, however, which one would see in the Army Veterinary Department have at least the merit of a proposed economy.

The waste in horseflesh during the South African Campaign has been little short of appalling, and for that waste the inadequacy of the A.V.D. has been largely to blame.

Not that the members of that department are responsible for its failure. With the material at their disposal they have done what they could; where they failed failure was inevitable, and could easily have been foretold.

That failure came of an inability to differentiate between the conditions of peace and war.

In peace, the number of horses that go sick never put a strain on hospital accommodation. They can be left to get well; there is no pressing haste; drugs, nursing, doctoring are all easily available.

In war, where a regiment discards its horses by the hundred, the peace capacity of the department is swamped at once. Hospitals have to be organised along the line of march, sick horses have to be collected, convalescents to be transferred to grazing farms, the cured to be forwarded, the dead to be buried, and constant attention dispensed to all. For this not only does no provision exist in England, but the organisation of the department goes far to prevent any effective improvisation.

It has, to begin with, no subordinate belongings. Everything it is supposed to have belongs to some

one else. Its farriers and shoeing smiths are regimental property: it cannot call any fragment of its scattered soul its own. It is at the beck and call of every emergency, not as a department, but as a loosened bundle of units.

When a hospital has to be improvised on the line of march there exists no nucleus for expansion in the shape of a staff.

Its officers, attached and detached, worked already beyond the limit of effective capacity, cannot be spared for duties not immediately connected with the army in the field; even if they could they carry with them no executive control, and there is no subordinate department to be controlled by them. Application is made to the handiest cavalry regiment for an officer to look after the hospital, and the officer forthcoming is, as may be imagined, not the one whose services will be most missed.

Colonels of cavalry regiments on active service, probably already underhanded, do not detach their best men to look after sick horses, and it is generally a 'stiff-un' who takes charge of the hospital; and the cavalry officer selected for his incapacity can be 'stiffer' than any of the horses he is ever asked to handle.

About him are attracted, apparently by that magnetic quality which incapacity seems to possess for its kind, all the useless odds and ends in camp, and with these, and a few neat cases of veterinary stores, the hospital is started.

With men entirely new to the intimate needs of a horse, it is small wonder that the hospital becomes

and remains a costly and offensive dumping-ground for moribund beasts.

Its convalescents are of no use till the war is over, but its convalescents fortunately are few ; the dying and useless animals, however, last long enough to consume a quantity of valuable forage, which at the front, inside of whole but starving horses, might change the current of a campaign.

It would be cheaper, wiser, and more effective, with our present inadequate arrangements, at once to shoot every horse that cannot be cured on the line of march.

The Army Veterinary Department is undermanned, even on its peace footing. A high standard of excellence is demanded of those who would enter, yet the service is not made sufficiently attractive for men of ability. A bribe in the shape of good starting-pay is thrown out to the subaltern, but there the advantages of the service end.

Consequently the best men go into civil employment, and from that source the army counts on getting auxiliary assistance when its own meagre capacity is overstrained. In our South African Campaign two-thirds of the veterinary officers had to be drawn from outside the army.

Now, though a few good men may be forthcoming from patriotic motives in such an emergency, the majority of such hurriedly-enlisted recruits are certainly neither in standing nor in knowledge on the level of the men with whom they have to work.

Even were their qualifications all that could be

wished, they would have acquired little experience in civil life to deal with the everyday contingencies of a campaign.

Most of the ailments from which horses suffer on service are military specialities.

The experience of a man who has always had to deal with horses regularly and adequately fed, and for which the indicated drug, the required appliance, or even the needful rest are always forthcoming, is astray when confronted with the effects of famine rations, and obliged to treat with make-shift remedies the victims of starvation, ill-feeding, and overwork.

Sore backs, the outcome of long-continued pressure on shrunken muscle, collapse from exhaustion and want of water, the various diseases of the blood which come from over-heating food, he has probably never had seriously to consider.

Rest, his panacea for many ills, he cannot prescribe on a campaign.

He has never had to make pads of straw bottle-cases to prevent the breaking of a sore ; never seen the artillery 'bus horse fed on patties of wheat flour and chopped chaff, never had to replenish his medicine chest from the commissariat stores, and to devise substitutes for what cannot be found there. From two to three years are required to make a veterinary surgeon proficient in army ailments, and one campaign at least is needed before he comes to his full value on active service.

A case in point occurred at Welgelegen. A field officer's charger, a very valuable animal, which had been ailing the day before, and had in consequence

been led that morning, fell exhausted in a donga on the south side of the spruit. Neither force nor persuasion could induce him even to lift his head. Two civil surgeons after listening to the symptoms diagnosed the case respectively as sand colic and acute rheumatism, and each agreed it was quite impossible the horse could be moved. The third to see him as the column moved by was a young army vet., who had learnt his business.

"Give him as much water as he wants and drive him into camp," he said shortly.

The water was brought, the horse drank greedily, and staggered on into his lines.

"What's the matter with him?" repeated the youngster as he watched the horse move; "he's got laminitis, and has sweated himself dry with pain."

That is but one instance of the advantage of familiarity with diseases most prevalent in the army.

But it is not only for the correct diagnosis of disease that such familiarity is needed, but for the prevention of others whose advent can be foreseen.

Expert supervision means effecting a great saving in horseflesh. Even for sore backs, that curse of cavalry campaigning, a good deal may be done.

Sore backs are caused less by bad riding and ill-made saddles than by sheer continuous pressure on one spot. As the horse grows lean from hard work and lack of food, the muscles waste and sink on either side of the spine, the saddle rests directly on the vertebræ, and the blood-vessels of the shrunken fascia are squeezed dry.

Bullets are about the only things that take a

cavalryman out of his saddle, but even if he could be persuaded on the march to walk one mile in three or four, he would still leave sufficient weight on his horse to prevent any return of blood to the wasted vessels, and his kit is of too complicated a contrivance to encourage off-saddling during temporary halts.

Yet, pending the operation of common-sense in cavalry affairs, and the decline of the charger as a beast of burden, much may be done by the transference of backs, which have reached the danger point of atrophy, from the squadron to the traces of artillery or transport.

At present from lack of efficient supervision, and of a department responsible for the condition of, and qualified to handle for its best advantage, the working horses of an army, disease is permitted to make such progress that the horse, when reported unfit, is not worth the price of his shoes as a fighting unit.

What can be done in the way of prevention was seen in the outbreak of pleuro-pneumonia among the oxen on their way to Bloemfontein for the final advance.

The prospects of an advance of any sort was threatened by the advent of that deadly scourge, and had not a man been on the spot to combat it Lord Roberts must have remained where he was.

The diseased animals were killed, the railway utilised as a boundary line between the suspected and the secure, guards mounted on every level crossing, and 5,000 beasts inoculated which might have been infected with the disease.

The fashion in which glanders has been stamped out in England since 1886, though still rife in India, might also be cited.

Yet the Indian veterinary establishment is excellent in theory, and, had its effectiveness not been sacrificed to dishonest economies in the estimates, and its station hospitals persistently undermanned, might serve as a model for what we must have throughout the army.

But the alterations called for are fundamental ; the department must have a new basis. Fundamental, since it must begin for the first time to be a department. It must have a subordinate staff, and that staff must be its own.

It must draw likely men from cavalry regiments, train them in its schools, and dispense them when trained where they are needed, but as members of the department now and of the regiment no longer.

Thus a Veterinary Department will at last be formed, controlled by its own officers ; and though distributed throughout the service, with units always available, when required, to supply a staff for emergency hospitals in time of war, or to undertake any such pressing duties in the field, for the fulfilment of which the Army Veterinary Department should be alone responsible.

This creation of departmental control would go some way to improve the status of the veterinary surgeon ; his temporal disabilities have already been recognised by the War Office, and, it may be hoped, are on the road to remedy.

An immediate increase in the peace strength of the

department is essential, and some methods manufactured for its orderly expansion in time of war. The sudden swamping of a military establishment by civil assistance will not, one trusts, be seen again.

Since a tendency seems to exist to supplement our deficiencies in times of stress from the auxiliary forces, there is no reason that Yeomanry vets. should not undergo a month's yearly training, and be retained for employment when required in the field.

Also, seeing the drain on the establishment in time of war, retired surgeons might be called out on such occasions for home service, and thus every man under a certain age made available for service in the field.

And when once the A.V.D. is organised on a satisfactory basis, one may hope that the Remount Department will be taken in hand.

As present one's wonder is, considering the fashion in which remount officers are appointed, and the chaotic condition in which the theory of remounts remains, that the department manages to supply the army with the animals. It only does so, in an emergency like the present, by a very large and quite needless expenditure of money. It is to be hoped that this war will persuade the authorities to consider the question of large remount farms, managed not by needy cavalry officers, but by practical breeders of horses. The Orange River Colony offers as fine ground for such farms as may be found anywhere. But whether we decide to breed horses or not, an end should be made to the buying of them by men who often require expert advice before deciding on

the soundness of the beasts they buy. Let the Remount Department be made an adjunct of the A.V.D. and let the men already responsible for the health of the army horses be entrusted also with their production.

THE ARMY PAY DEPARTMENT.

One cannot in speaking of the Army Pay Department plead the loss resulting from obsolete organisation and overwork, simply because the department has so far, in spite of every temptation, declined to break down, but one may instance its working in South Africa as a fair sample of the chaotic result of a dual control at headquarters,

It makes no show in the reports of Correspondents, it cuts no figure in the list of honours, yet on its smooth and silent working the comfort of a force in the field depends.

In this land of lost reputations it is almost a compliment to be overlooked, and the A.P.D. can claim to have attracted no adverse attention.

Dumped down in Capetown with a fantastic page of the mobilisation tables and a field service pay list—differing only in type from the ordinary one—for its guidance, without peace preparation or scheme of operation, it has had to act entirely on its own responsibility, and solve new problems in its own way.

At the manœuvres of 1898 every other department in the army was tested but that responsible for its funds.

Its home organisation is so clumsy that at no time could more than 30 per cent. of its staff be spared for South Africa. It has no reserve of officers or clerks, and to meet a call of 175, which should by right have been 350, only half a dozen of the clerks rejoined and a few officers, more than half of whom had been retired at sixty years of age as officially worn out.

The A.P.D. suffers, as has been said, from a dual control ; and neither a department nor a man can effectively serve two masters.

The financial secretary is responsible for its accounts, the quartermaster-general for its organisation. The accounts are clumsy ; but all the help possible has been given by the civil side, and the main difficulty arose from an absolute absence of organisation before the war, for the lack of which the military authorities are alone to blame.

On the transference of the major operations to Natal, the proper proportion of the Pay Department staff was forwarded to Durban, the Chief Paymaster supposing that the consequent deficiency would be made good at Capetown on the arrival of fresh troops.

He trusted, however, in vain ; for the Capetown staff never exceeded that prescribed for two Army Corps, while it had to deal practically with the equivalents of five, distributed through the two conquered Republics as well as in the Cape Colony, along a line of communications ten times the length of that in Natal.

Yet, as a sample of how to make the most of insufficient means, the big office in Capetown, with its

fourteen local branches and half a dozen up country, could scarcely be improved on.

The difficulties of payment have been met by working the campaign with paper, a special form of cheque payable through any bank being used; the supply officers being thus enabled to pay as they went.

By this avoidance of specie payments not only was there no loss of coin, but a considerable drain of gold from England was avoided; the monthly disbursements of the department amounting to one and a half million, nearly equal to the entire Army Vote in peace time.

Those who have had to do business with the department in Capetown have been agreeably astonished by a total absence of red tape in its working, a thorough knowledge of its own affairs, and a ready acceptance of responsibility for even its more obscure workings.

Yet this is the department's first campaign, and its entire machinery has had to be improvised in Capetown, for no contingency had been foreseen or provided for by the War Office.

The staff was doled out in so niggard a fashion that but for the climate and ability of its personnel a breakdown must have occurred.

Affairs undreamed of in peace have been thrust on the department and successfully manipulated.

If the War Office intends to set its house in order, it cannot do better than take the advice of the men who have built up the system on which the war has been worked.

The financial methods of the army are faulty.

The system is so cumbersome that it will barely work under peace conditions ; in the field it becomes impossible.

The department should be placed under its proper head, the financial secretary ; accounts should be simplified, needless counter-signatures abolished, and financial advisers appointed to the staff of generals in the field, with powers as extended as are granted in India in similar circumstances.

At present a chief paymaster on active service, raising and spending a million and a half a month, cannot sanction the issue of fourpence a day to a soldier without the counter-signature of, it may be, a junior staff officer.

This last absurdity brings one to the general treatment of the department.

The maximum of responsibility with the minimum of authority seems to be the axiom of the War Office. Work is out of all proportion to the pay, and bears a still more forbidding relation to any other form of recognition.

The men of the corps get nothing. They alone are debarred commissions, and suffer the slowest promotion in the army.

Neglect may very easily ruin a most competent personnel. Over a third of the P.D. staff in South Africa, seeing their comrades in other branches continually promoted while they are deemed unworthy of recognition, have volunteered for service under the civil power.

There is no reason why the members of the Army Pay Department should be treated less liberally than

those of the Army Service Corps and Royal Medical Corps; and if a good man be worth having he is worth rewarding.

Otherwise, as a rule, you have him not; and he becomes the servant of another who deserves him better.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE REMAKING OF AN ARMY (*continued*)

THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

THE controversy which has eddied round the R.A.M.C. seems in many ways an idle one. It started with the treatment of the sick and wounded on the line of march; some people being apparently under the impression that a campaign should be conducted chiefly in the interest of the disabled, and that only goodwill is needed to carry all the comforts of a London hospital with a marching army. On this premise it seemed of course intolerable, in a town, with an army seven hundred miles from its base, and scarcely able to feed its own sound men and horses, that the sick were allowed to remain for several weeks in considerable discomfort.

The prevention of such an occurrence in the future might have been discussed philosophically, especially on such provisional premises; but the question degenerated instead into a personal and political altercation, in which the R.A.M.C. came in for much undeserved abuse, and some very ridiculous appraisement.

Those who might have found ground for argument as the apologists of the corps became its eulogists. They would find nothing faulty in its arrangements, nothing deficient in its skill, even its organisation left them undismayed. They saw in its practitioners the pick of the profession, and in its implements, if not modernity, at least the classic consecration sufficient for a soldier's needs.

Now such an attitude is neither logical nor of service to the cause. A man sent to buy horses at a fair with a twenty pound limit is not expected to return with Derby winners. And, considering the possible income of a skilful surgeon, the Government is not likely to attract those likely to attain it by the offer of a bare sufficiency.

The men who take to army doctoring are either fonder of soldiering than of surgery, desire to avoid the continuous struggle for existence, or crave a secure social position with an easy competence. Under either alternative you may find a clever man, but he will be a somewhat rare bird, and his abilities are not likely to be improved by sequestration from those influences which force research and effect improvement.

The agitation for army rank in the R.A.M.C. some years ago was significant of its qualities and ambition. Nominally its desire was to secure departmental control : but he must be a novice in soldiering who would expect a freer hand from a mere change of title ; and if such result has been obtained it is not appreciably apparent. On the other hand the result which might have been expected from such a change

has come about. The doctors prayed for title, for decoration ; in short, though perhaps they knew it not, for tape. And the red honour of tape has been granted them, as it always is granted, in knots about their fingers and in a noose about their necks.

Now the ambition of the army surgeon is, as a rule, to be as like a soldier and as unlike a doctor as the fates will permit. As a rule, too, he succeeds. He is a good sportsman, ready for any form of amusement, indifferent to danger, easy tempered, and generally to be relied upon in the treatment of straightforward ailments.

He is, in short, just what might be expected from the conditions of his existence—speaking always, be it remembered, of the average, not of the rare exception who is able to get out of the ruck and devote himself to some special study.

And, as he stands, he may very well be accepted by those who praise him. If another stamp of man is wanted he must be sought in some other fashion. The prospects of the R.A.M.C. and the conditions of its life, will not attract the men who make the epochs of surgery. How should they, make them as tempting as you will? It is not money that allures genius, but opportunity. The student who feels the future within him will stay where he has the largest scope for study. You will not find him in the army under any heading. If such men are required for a campaign they must be attached temporarily as they have been in the past. That also is opportunity and they will be glad of the experience. Only you need not pay them at the rate of £5,000 a year. Men can

be had sufficient for all the purposes of field surgery for far less than that. The miraculous operation is seldom possible in the pervading foulness of camp life, and the one man who can perform it is rather wasted at the front. Civil surgeons, the masters of any operation that can be performed in a field hospital, could be retained without great cost or difficulty for the possible needs of war.

It would be better to reinforce the R.A.M.C. by such men in the moment of emergency, than to attempt spasmodically to raise the level of proficiency in the corps *after* the mischief of successive campaigns.

But in the corps, even as it exists at present, some improvement might be made.

The majority of the office work on which an army doctor spends a good deal of his time might be relegated to medical clerks. This would free the doctor, in peace, from much of the deadening barrack influence which is so bad for him, and in war would largely expedite his treatment of the wounded. It is very probable that no small number of lives were sacrificed in South Africa to the making out of returns from which a surgeon should, on such occasions, be entirely exempt.

Nothing has such an obliterating effect on personality as routine, and barrack routine is of all forms the worst. It is that which has robbed the R.A.M.C. of initiative and adaptability, the lack of which was so conspicuous when the corps was confronted with a new environment at Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, and Pretoria.

There, its very means of grace was a stumbling-block, since the means were new. It could make the inadequacy of an ambulance wagon go a long way, but it did not know what in the world to do with a Court of Justice. Given an entire city out of which to construct hospitals, it resembled a yew, cut for centuries to the shape of an armchair, told suddenly to grow like a tree. The army doctor has been so clipped and stunted by army discipline, he has acquired such a habit of subordination, that he had ceased to consider the supreme claim of the sick, he had forgotten what it was, in the name of pain and death, to have authority, and he heartily damned the scope of an opportunity which completely overwhelmed his trammelled mind.

So it was a civil doctor and civilian authority which turned the shops of Pretoria inside out, and fitted up the finest hospital in South Africa. And the reason simply was that the military mind was so atrophied by continual ductility that it had lost the power of initiation.

That functional debility may be somewhat amended by freeing the corps as far as possible in peace time from the red tape of control.

It would seem also that the failure of the P.M.O. on whom the duty devolved to point out the dangers attending the occupation of Bloemfontein, after its water supply had been severed, must be attributed to this same disinclination to assume authority.

It has been repeatedly stated that no one could have foreseen the second outbreak of typhoid in Bloemfontein. Not only was it perfectly easy to

foresee, but its occurrence seemed so certain that the present writer drafted a telegram, the day after the main supply had been cut, to prepare the public for a general move of Lord Roberts's column to the line of the Modder, owing to the risks which would be run by the use of wells and dams long disused for drinking purposes and always regarded with suspicion. That telegram was suppressed by the Censor; one presumed, at the time, on account of the ignorance it displayed on the subject of a water supply.

The army stayed in Bloemfontein, and drank—and died.

We are told now that drinking may have had nothing to do with the propagation of the disease: that it was the dust which did it, or the drains, or the flies. Possibly! Our ignorance of the malady seems so considerable that all asseveration should be avoided.

Still, seeing that enteric fever is admitted occasionally to be water-borne, the sources of our drinking supply might have been subjected to more attention.

It would, anyway, have been a wise precaution to prevent men from quenching their thirst, as happened at Bloemfontein, with water in which the linen of enteric patients had been washed!

And that brings one to a suggestion, which may be as well made here as elsewhere, that a competent analyst should be attached on service to every head-quarter staff, to decide, where such selection is possible, on the sources of supply from which drinking water may be drawn.

There is no reason why the R.A.M.C. should

not furnish analysts able to pronounce with speed, and with such certainty as is possible, on the quality of water, save that the War Office would be sure to load any man, drawn departmentally, with so many other duties that his operation as an analyst would be rendered farcical.

It is to be hoped that nothing written here will read as censure on a brave and hard-working body of men. The fashion in which our surgeons have exposed themselves in action under a fire which kept the fighting-men upon their faces has won the admiration of all with whom they served, and the endurance with which they tended the wounded, hour by hour, after the long strain of a big day's fighting, set an example of self-sacrifice to all.

This campaign has taught the combatant ranks that their non-combatant comrades are in courage no whit behind them, and probably the sick and wounded have never before been so admirably attended.

The defects of the army surgeons are those of their creators : their excellences are their own.

With wise encouragement, less restriction, a more liberal expenditure, the R.A.M.C. might easily be made more effective and of greater profit to the State.

But the reformers must not endeavour to reform too much.

APPENDICES

A NOTE ON THE CLIMATE OF THE VELD

I

THE great expenditure of horses, the grievous mortality amongst our men, seems to have produced an impression in England as to the salubrity of South Africa the very opposite of the truth.

Since that impression may act as a serious deterrent to intending colonists, the sooner it be removed the better.

The climate of the two conquered Republics is, so far as my experience goes, the finest in the world.

Its bracing dryness may be equalled on the southern uplands of Siberia, its splendid sunshine on the western slopes of the Andes, its tonic clearness among the Arabian hills, but nowhere can weather more favourable to man and beast be found for the round of the year.

A good deal of discouraging superlative has been devoted to the midsummer heat upon the high veld ; but the settler will never need to share the soldier's experience of lying for fifteen hours under the unclouded sun, and will never in consequence be conscious of the soldier's lassitude, nor of the soldier's thirst. Even the oldest colonists found their experiences enlarged when they shared them with the army.

The heat is, no doubt, great ; but it is dry and still ; and a head habituated to exposure found it endurable at midday without a hat.

Then the nights, even in midsummer, are exquisitely fresh. There is no difficulty about sleep, as in most hot climates ; indeed, sleep in South Africa acquires a new meaning. One wakes at dawn as if refreshed not from slumber but by food, as though one had drunk rest out of the night.

And this coolness that falls with darkness is attended with none of the evil consequences which follow such changes in most climates. One was warned to wear nothing but woollen underclothing, and to provide oneself with a cholera belt and all the precautions of the East.

But I found the linen which serves for an English summer amply sufficient, though having often to sleep out upon the veld without any sort of covering ; and only wore wool in the shape of a short riding coat before sunrise and after sunset in the winter days.

As to disease ; typhoid is undoubtedly endemic in South Africa, but so it is in every country with a somewhat unclean people. On the veld there is no reason that any one with common care and cleanly habits should suffer from enteric, and the towns should soon be freed from it under British rule. A man who cannot keep his health on the uplands of South Africa would lose it anywhere, and many have found health there who had looked for it in vain elsewhere.

In the matter of horses the late campaign has been especially deceptive, since horse sickness, the scourge we most feared, probably did not cost us a hundred head in the whole campaign. But horse sickness is a waning malady, and not so widespread as is imagined. The cavalry was a good deal troubled by laminitis and sand colic, but these are rather the attendant ills of a campaign than of a climate, and horse breeders in the Orange River Colony

would find themselves confronted with no ills which are not common to every country, and in possession of many advantages which are rarely to be acquired.

Even during the campaign, only care and good feeding were needed to keep horses in health. I started from Cape-town with three country-bred horses—two to draw a four-wheeled cart built there to my design, and one to ride. With the exception of the few miles from Paardeberg to Bloemfontein, when one of the cart-horses was down with laminitis, those three horses did the entire work of the campaign; and the survivors, one being shot, fetched within five pounds of what they cost me. That, in the very worst of markets—since few civilians were allowed to possess horses—was a sufficient testimony to their condition after five months of hard work.

It proves, also, that there is nothing in the veld climate especially antagonistic to horseflesh, though the abrupt changes in the temperature of the ground during the summer rains is trying to the feet, and upon horses fed, as ours were, almost wholly on nitrogenous food, provocative of fever.

II

THE WEAR AND TEAR OF A DIVISION.

The following table will probably be of interest, showing the wear and tear on a division of a month's fighting. The absence of the Warwickshire Regiment puts the first total about 900 beneath its proper strength.

SIXTH DIVISION SOUTH AFRICAN FIELD FORCE.

DIFFERENCE IN STRENGTH BETWEEN 12TH FEBRUARY AND 14TH MARCH, 1900.

UNITS.	STRENGTH ON FEB. 12.		STRENGTH ON MARCH 14.				DECREASE.		EXPLANATION OF DECREASE.										REMARKS.			
	Officers.	W.O.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	W.O.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	W.O.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Killed.		Died of wounds.		W'nded.		Sick.	Miss- ing.			Other causes.		
										Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.		Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.		Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.
Divisional Troops ...	38	2	1006	36	2	877	2	—	129	—	4*	—	—	1	17	—	65	1	—	—	42†	1 killed by light- ning, 2 men left with wounded officers.
2nd Buffs (E. Kent)...	18	1	786	10	1	575	8	—	211	2	25	—	—	6	105	—	81	—	—	—	—	
2nd Gloucestershire Regt.	23	1	716	19	1	572	4	—	144	—	9	—	3	3	46	1	80	—	—	—	—	
1st W. Riding Regt.	23	1	789	17	1	596	6	—	193	—	23	—	1	4	124	1	45	—	—	—	—	
1st Oxford Light Inf.	20	1	595	14	1	430	6	—	165	2	16	1	1	2	74	1	74	—	—	—	—	
1st Yorkshire Regt....	21	1	953	12	1	723	9	—	230	1	46	—	—	7	131	1	42	—	—	—	—	
1st Welsh Regt.	23	1	875	10	1	660	13	—	215	2	32	—	—	10	165	—	5	1†	13	—	—	
1st Essex Regt.&	23	1	936	11	1	757	12	—	179	1	21	—	1	5	128	3	8	—	15	2	7	
	189	9	6656	129	9	5190	60	—	1466	8	176	3	5	38	790	7	400	2	43	2	52	

* 1 died (disease).

† Left at Kimberley and Enslin and with Balloon Section.

‡ Since heard of at Pretoria.

§ 1 officer, Staff employ; 1 officer to Mounted Infantry; 7 men fell out on march.

|| This has been considerably reduced.

1 killed by lighting, 2 men left with wounded officers.

III

THE MARCH OF THE SIXTH DIVISION FROM
MODDER RIVER TO BLOEMFONTEIN

DATE.	FROM	TO	HOUR OF		DIS- TANCE.
			START.	ARRIVAL.	
Feb. 12	Enslin, Graspan	Ramdram	6 a.m.	1 p.m.	Miles. 9½
" 13	Ramdram	Waterval Drift	5 a.m.	11 a.m.	10
" 14	Waterval Drift	Wegdrai	1 a.m.	11 a.m.	9½
" 14	<i>a</i> Wegdrai	Klip Drift	5 p.m.	12.30 a.m.	11½
" 16	} <i>b</i> Klip Drift.....	Brandvallei	5 a.m.	12 noon	} 11
" 17			3 a.m.	12.30 p.m.	
" 17	<i>c</i> Brandvallei	Paardeberg	5 p.m.	9.30 p.m.	4½
" 18	<i>d</i> Paardeberg	Boer Laager	3 a.m.	7 a.m.	12½
Mar. 1	<i>e</i> Boer Laager	Osfontein	9.30 a.m.	11.30 a.m.	4
" 7	<i>f</i> Osfontein	Poplar Grove	3.30 a.m.	7 p.m.	20
" 8	<i>g</i> Poplar Grove	Roodepoort Farm ...	12 noon	4.30 p.m.	7
" 10	<i>h</i> Roodepoort Farm ...	Driefontein (near) ...	6 a.m.	6 p.m.	10
" 11	Driefontein	Kaals Spruit Farm...	5.30 a.m.	3 p.m.	14
" 12	Kaals Spruit Farm...	Venters Vallei	5.30 a.m.	2.30 p.m.	12½
" 13	<i>i</i> Venters Vallei	Brand Kop	3 p.m.	1 a.m. 14th	13½
" 14	<i>k</i> Brand Kop	Bloemfontein	9 a.m.	2 p.m.	6

(a) Affair with enemy's outposts.

(b) 13th Brigade engaged with enemy's rearguard, 18th Brigade followed.

(c) 55½ miles in five marching days.

(d) Battle of Paardeberg.

(e) Change camp.

(f) Including detour.

(g) Drove enemy from positions.

(h) Battle of Driefontein.

(i) 77 miles in six days, 7th to 13th.

(k) Marched through Bloemfontein.

IV

THE KILLED AND WOUNDED

Appended is a list of those who were killed and wounded, who were missing or taken prisoners, during Lord Roberts's march from the Modder River to Bloemfontein.

ENGAGEMENTS.	KILLED.		WOUNDED.		MISSING.		PRISONERS.	
	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.	Officers.	N.C.O.'s and men.
Ramdam (Colonel Hannay's Mounted Infantry), Feb. 11	—	3	—	20	—	21	1	10
Dekiel's Drift, Feb. 12	—	—	1	2	—	1	—	—
Waterval Drift, Feb. 15	1	1	1	21	1	27	1	4
Jacobsdal, Feb. 14 and 15	—	2	2	24	—	3	—	—
Cavalry Division (to Kimberley), Feb. 13 to 17	2	9	13	82	—	84	4	—
Klip Kraal, Feb. 16 and 17	—	11	6	99	—	3	—	—
Paardeberg, Feb. 18	16	198	57	879	2	58	4	—
Paardeberg (Cronje's capture), Feb. 19 to 28... ..	—	27	15	146	—	—	—	—
Osfontein, March 1 to 6	—	1	1	7	—	1	—	—
Poplar Grove, March 7.....	2	2	1	41	—	1	—	—
Driefontein, March 10	4	58	20	342	—	14	—	—
Total	25	312	117	1663	3	213	10	14

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